

# Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality

Conference Report  
2017

May 30–31, 2017  
Mykolas Romeris University  
Vilnius, Lithuania



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International conference

**Single accreditation of joint programmes –  
turning the Bologna guideline into reality**

*May 30–31, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*  
<http://jpsa2017.mruni.eu/>

Conference Report, 2017

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# Foreword

On 30 and 31 May 2017 a consortium of six European higher education institutions in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Spain, and Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency together with the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) organised a conference titled *Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality*. The conference was hosted by Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) in Vilnius.

One of the aims of the conference was to stimulate discussions on how to facilitate single accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management implemented by a consortium consisting of the Defence Academy of the Netherlands; National Distance Education University (Spain); Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania); University of Salamanca (Spain); Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Latvia); Estonian Academy of Security Sciences and coordinated by Frontex, and the European Union Border and Coast Guard Agency. However, the conference was not devoted to discussion of one single case, but rather on this basis aiming to contribute towards a broader goal to clarify in practical terms the remaining obstacles for single accreditation of joint programmes as was agreed by all Ministers of European Higher Education Area in May 2015, when The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was endorsed.

There was a need to better understand various national contexts and explore ideas on “what”, “how” and “when” the regulation could be changed on the national levels and promoted internationally, as well by joint efforts of policymakers and implementers on various levels.

The main actors within the European Higher Education Area such as EC's, BFUG's, ENQA's, EQAR's, EUA's, EURASHE's, ECA's, ESU's, and ENIC-NARIC's representatives as well as representatives of the quality assurance agencies of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Spain and the Netherlands were invited to present their insights and recommendations on these issues. This publication presents some of the input and discussions that were raised by them and others during the conference. All presentations of the participants can be found at the conference website <http://jpsa2017.mruni.eu/>

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this publication, the conference and all the valuable discussions on possible solutions during the conference with the hope that certain recommendations agreed will be implemented in practice. Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, deserves our special gratitude for funding this important conference for the European Higher Education Area.

**Prof. Dr Inga Žalėnienė**

*Chairperson of Conference Steering Committee*





The background is a solid blue color. It features several white geometric lines: a curved line starting from the top left and extending towards the top right; a horizontal line across the middle; and a line that starts from the bottom left, goes diagonally up to the right, then horizontally to the right, and then diagonally down to the right.

# **1** **INTRODUCTION**

## Welcome address

**Inga Žalėnienė**

*Vice-Rector for Education and Research, Mykolas Romeris University*

*May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

### **Distinguished Guests and Dear Colleagues, Experts, Observers and Students,**

Welcome to the “Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality” conference, which is organized jointly by the EU FRONTEX agency, the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and Mykolas Romeris University. It is an honour and a great pleasure to address this unique gathering today and to acknowledge all of you. Today’s conference symbolizes a broader meaning and heralds a new era in higher education – and I am glad we are here to witness it.

Since the last decade, there has been a rapid expansion of higher education institutions offering joint programmes. Nearly all higher education institutions worldwide are engaged in some international activities including mobility of students and staff, mutual learning, and greater opportunities for cooperation. Joint Study Programmes have become the hallmark in ensuring international quality assurance, and creating new possibilities for students to develop knowledge, skills and experience than traditional study programmes could by a single institution. MRU in cooperation with the EU FRONTEX agency and five other European higher education institutions from Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain developed the European Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management for Bachelor’s Graduates possessing relevant work experience in the State Border Guard Service for 3 years and wishing to broaden their knowledge and gain new skills and experience. The EU FRONTEX agency has demonstrated its support through its active involvement in the application process as well as providing

financing for the joint study programme. We are aware that the implementation, quality assurance and recognition of joint study programmes are not an easy task and we are very grateful for the support from the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) for creating favourable conditions that ensure academic recognition of foreign credentials and access to information about the role of higher education systems and the qualification recognition process. At regional level, continuous efforts are still needed to agree on common provisions for external quality assurance that are acceptable to everyone in Europe. To date, the Bologna Follow-up Group has developed principles that should be followed in the development, implementation and assessment of joint study programmes without the need to apply additional national criteria. Moreover, other quality assurance agencies and stakeholders have worked tirelessly to develop and test different models for making recognition and quality assurance of joint study programmes an easier process.

The added value of a joint degree programme cannot be overemphasized as it is more than contractual – it represents a co-joint relationship based on mutual understanding on the development of a new arena for knowledge, and hence the prime objective should be to improve the quality of the education and research, study process and to raise academic standards even higher.

Let us use the opportunity today to work towards ensuring that such procedures become a reality, that we begin the journey to agree on the key priorities for assessing joint

programmes, to identify the essential core areas deemed necessary to foster and facilitate the accreditation processes more readily and easily for all stakeholders involved. Let us remember that as leaders shaping the younger generations' future, we have a responsibility to encourage diversity across borders, quality education, respect and mutual appreciation of cultures and individual experiences in the sphere of internationalization of higher education. Joint study programmes are now a characteristic feature of

the globalization process and a tool for cross-border matching of supply and demand of talent and skills through education.

So today, I encourage you to be active and engage in a fruitful exchange of ideas, effective networking, and discussions that lead to more thought-provoking and inspiring solutions. I wish you a memorable conference here in Vilnius. Welcome to Mykolas Romeris University and to Lithuania. Thank you.

## Opening speech

### **Françoise Profit**

*Head of Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat*

*May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

### **Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,**

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me today. As Head of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat I am honoured to take part in this international conference. The title of the conference contains the words “turning the Bologna guideline into reality”; I will, in a few words, attempt to follow this guideline and see how far it has turned into reality.

In 2005 the topic of Quality Assurance in the Bologna process was raised as one of the main issues, and ministers adopted the first ESG. In the *Bucharest Communiqué*, in 2012, Ministers “acknowledge[d] the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance” (ESG)”. They asked for a revision of the ESG “to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision [would] be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which [would] be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group”. They “welcome[d] the external evaluation of EQAR and [...] encourage[d] quality assurance agencies to apply for registration. [They] allow[ed] EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national

requirements. In particular, [they] aimed to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.”<sup>1</sup>

Finally, they “encourage[d] higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach.”<sup>2</sup> They expressed their willingness to “examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts.”<sup>3</sup>

Following this commitment, the Bologna Follow-Up Group commissioned an ad hoc expert group to draft “a policy proposal for a specific European accreditation approach for joint programmes, which should be applied to all those joint programmes that [were] subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level”.<sup>4</sup>

In its report, the group stated that the main problems [were] related to recognition issues and quality assurance. It underlined, as a general rule, that “joint programmes challenge the existing national quality assurance systems: institutions from different higher education systems, with different political and legal systems as well as different quality assurance regimes, jointly develop and offer a study programme.”<sup>5</sup> It

1 *Bucharest Communiqué*, p. 2

2 *Bucharest Communiqué*, p. 4

3 *Bucharest Communiqué*, p. 4

4 In *Work plan 2012-2015* (BFUG structures underpinning the 2012-2015 work plan).

5 In *Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, July 2014, p. 3

indicated several national quality assurance processes as well. The report also recommended that “In a joint quality assurance process several agencies [should] work together and agree on a common assessment framework”<sup>6</sup>, but moreover, it [would] be better to propose an integrated process by setting up “a single quality assurance procedure [which should propose] only one agency and one assessment framework for carrying out the procedure. The framework consists of two building blocks: the European shared component (the “core”) and the relevant national components (the “plus”).”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, on the basis of the report of this ad hoc group, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been developed to ease the external quality assurance of these programmes. In 2015, in Yerevan, the Ministers officially took a second step with the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in the EHEA, and they also adopted the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This new step should have provided a basis for all stakeholders on how to guarantee quality assurance and its twin purposes of responsibility and enhancement. Nevertheless, we can notice that the implementation of the ESG is not as good as it should be.

In fact, one of the main problems lies in cross-border quality assurance. “The EHEA countries present very different situations with regard to internationalisation and mobility.”<sup>8</sup> “However, and according to the 2015 *Implementation report*, more than half of them lacked a national internationalisation strategy or guidance to the various stakeholders involved in the internationalisation process.”<sup>9</sup>

The main difficulty we have to face is implementation and the ability of higher education to be evaluated by non-national QAA. In 2015, “Armenia and Austria [were]

the only examples of countries that [had] opened up the possibility to their higher education institutions to undertake evaluations with a foreign agency. Around 75 % of systems failed to follow through on the Bucharest Communiqué commitment to allow their institutions to be evaluated by EQAR registered agencies”.<sup>10</sup>

During today’s conference, we will have an update on the situation and we will see the progress made since then. During the period 2015–2018, within the framework of the work plan of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, the working group on Implementation set up a dedicated session last autumn in France in Nice concerning “Internationalisation of (External) Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area trying to identify the main trends and developments”. During that meeting, the debates highlighted the lack of reciprocal understanding by both sending and host countries, the main problem pointed out in that case being the quality assurance framework. The need for a proper memorandum of understanding signed by the host country and the institutions operating in it, was highlighted.

Many other points were brought up during the discussions such as:

- the lack of a common language or the very different levels of English of the people involved;
- the legal aspects as well as the cultural differences;
- the connection between cross-border quality assurance and high financial costs. According to a recent ENQA study, most cross-border activities of quality assurance agencies are self-funded.

It was underlined that cross-border quality assurance creates an opportunity to think “outside the box” and share experience, and poses new challenges and motivation to mobile agencies. Considering the diversity of

6 In *Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, July 2014, p. 4

7 In *Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, July 2014, p. 4

8 *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna process Implementation report*, p. 22

9 Idem

10 *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna process Implementation report*, p. 95

the problems and the diversity of specific national criteria, we understand why we will, today and tomorrow, work to improve accreditation practices of joint programmes and, more specifically, around the European Joint Master's Programme in Strategic Border Management.

I truly hope today's and tomorrow's discussions on the challenges, problems, obstacles and actions needed to implement single accreditation of European joint programmes will help to put the EHEA policies into practice. Thank you for your attention.

# Opening speech

**Giedrius Viliūnas**

*Vice-Minister for Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania*

*May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

## **Dear Members of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management consortium, Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues,**

It is a pleasure and honour to welcome you in Lithuania, at Mykolas Romeris University, on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on the occasion of this important event – the “Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality” international conference.

If we look at the implementation reports of the European Higher Education Area we can observe that Lithuania is among the top countries in regard to adoption of the Bologna reforms. We have a fully functional system of European degrees and study cycles, a well-developed and fully accredited external quality assurance system, continuous and targeted discussions on empowering student-centred learning at institutions, and nowadays we are in the process of installing short cycle studies in our system of higher learning and vocational training.

An important feature that distinguishes our higher education system is international openness. We are among the few countries that fully allow EQAR-registered quality agencies of other countries to evaluate our study programmes and this evaluation is recognized without limitations for our national accreditation. We have a very good progress in widening the offer of international study programmes of various types

at our higher education institutions and are keen to welcome more international students and teachers in our country.

That is why we are very proud of the initiative of Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), EU FRONTEX agency and the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management consortium to foster the implementation of one of the very practical and nonetheless slow-moving guidelines of the Bologna Process – single accreditation of joint programmes. We do understand though the amount of obstacles this can encounter in the legislation and especially people's mindsets in such rich and different higher education systems of our Europe. At the same time, we are deeply convinced that this is one of the very important drivers of the unification of the European Higher Education Area which we are enthusiastic about.

Let me thank in advance of this event the EU FRONTEX agency that has done a groundbreaking work regarding the subject matter of this conference; to ensure that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania is absolutely open and supportive to suggestions and recommendations you will produce; and to wish you a very fruitful conference and a beautiful stay in Vilnius.

## Opening speech

### **Henrik Wärnhjelm**

*Head of Training Unit, Frontex, EU Agency*

*May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

### **Dear Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The core task of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex is to promote operational cooperation among the national authorities working in the field of border management. Interoperability is a clear prerequisite for efficient cooperation, – and to achieve a high level of interoperability, proper training and education is needed. Our training mission is to support the Member States to achieve a high, efficient and uniform level of border and coast guarding.

We aim to promote a common European Border and Coast Guard culture with high ethical standards. Efforts to develop common European standards for border and coast guard training were already made prior to the establishment of Frontex by introducing the Common Core Curriculum for border guard basic training. The Common Core Curriculum was later revised and the fourth edition of this document is to be launched next month. It took us, however, some time to realize that in order to have as strong impact as possible on the European and Coast Guard community, we need to target also the future leaders. At the same time, a gap in the education system for border and coast guard officers was identified. While Master's programmes on policing are available in every Member State, no programme on border management is delivered anywhere. To fill this gap and to get the desired impact, the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management programme was developed. This programme is strongly anchored in the professional sector for which it has been developed. It originates from the border and coast guard community and it is developed in collaboration. Designed as a

programme where the learning has a practical application for the ultimate beneficiaries – the European Border and Coast Guards.

It was obvious from the very beginning that the programme should be made accessible to potential students from all Member States. This was one of the reasons why it was considered important to achieve a joint award. This proved, however, to be quite a challenge due to the differences between the national regulations on higher education. During the development of the programme we seemed to be close to bumping into the walls. The development of the programme was indeed an exciting learning experience for all involved in it. We will shortly have the opportunity to learn more about the programme and the sometimes even painful history of its development.

The experience gained during the development of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management programme shows that there is still much to be done in order to harmonize national regulations on higher education. I do hope that during this conference we will be able to identify some of the obstacles and eventually also find solutions to overcome them. The core of the Bologna principles is after all to harmonize and enhance interoperability. These principles correlate actually very strongly with the strategic goals of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex. What we especially want to do is to achieve interoperability and enhance a common European Border and Coast Guard culture. In this regard, I believe that what will follow now is of great importance. Thank you.





# **2**

## **PLENARY CONTRIBUTIONS**

# European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management – a reflective history

**Anemona Peres**

*Project Manager of the European Joint Master's programme  
in Strategic Border Management, Frontex, EU Agency  
May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

## Introduction

An important task of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency,<sup>11</sup> is to support training and education of national border guards through the establishment of common training standards at European level. Frontex has successfully developed “common curricula” for border guard education and training that were adopted by the Member States and implemented at national level, in line with the common training principles and the training philosophy of Frontex (Frontex, 2015c). Frontex activities in the field of border guard education aim to promote a European border guard culture with high standards on fundamental rights, ethics and leadership. The European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management is a result of a Frontex project aiming to develop a European common education programme for mid/high-level officers of agencies responsible for border security in the EU, focusing on promoting strategic leadership and enhancing European cooperation in border management.

## Background and rationale

The grounds for developing this European Joint Master's Programme lay in Art. 8p

and Art 36. of the Frontex amended regulation<sup>12</sup> which stipulates the development of common European learning standards for border guard officers (“common core curricula”), and the Stockholm Programme (2010) which emphasizes the necessity to create frameworks for engaging the law enforcement officers in various forms of exchange/mobility programmes, to contribute to the development of a common culture and common approach to European border security, in accordance with Frontex mandate in the field of border guard training. Moreover, the Internal Security Strategy for the European Union (European Council, 2010) encourages the European bodies to adopt a strategic approach to professional training in order to strengthen the national capacity of the Member States (MS), reinforcing the European dimension of training and European cooperation in the law enforcement field.

One of the main added values of this EU Master's programme, in addition to its key European dimension resides in the fact that it fills the current gap in border guard education across the EU, as in Europe there is no higher education programme at Master's level focused on Strategic Border Management. Therefore, much interest was

<sup>11</sup> [www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

<sup>12</sup> REGULATION (EU) 2016/1624 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC

expressed towards Frontex by the MS to address the common needs of this particular target group – mid and high-level border guard officers across the EU. Moreover, as no MS could afford to establish at national level such a Master's Programme for their limited number of high-level officers working in a border management function at strategic level, the development of a Joint Master's at European level is a great opportunity for all MS to qualify and provide a professional development opportunity for their high-level officers, in a European framework. From a financial point of view, this Joint Master's offer to the Border Guard community is an important mechanism to streamline the high-level education initiatives and costs, in a coordinated approach, avoiding overlaps, duplication or inconsistencies and irrelevance of training for the respective target. From a European perspective, this programme is a highly cost-effective investment in European border guard executive education.

The goal of the programme was to bring together in the same classroom the present and future leaders of each border guard organisation in Europe<sup>13</sup>, and to create learning opportunities for them to study together, to learn from each other, to understand each other's countries' challenges and issues, to see how the same problems are dealt with in a different country, the advantages and limitations of each approach, to draw from the current operational context in which the entire learning was embedded and to develop together solutions that work in practice, in the best interests of European border security and of the sending border guard organisations – which are the ultimate beneficiary. This will also contribute to the policymaking process at European level in the field of border management.

Based on an open call to the MS border guard organisations that was targeting the development of a higher education programme

for medium-level officers, the project was initiated in early 2012, with a group of enthusiastic universities and academies from Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Ireland, France, Romania, Spain, the Netherlands and Malta which had expressed an interest to embark on the development of a consortium for the purpose of this programme. Along the way, some of these institutions faced challenges and limitations arising from national education regulations that forced them to reconsider their level of engagement within the programme, from potential full consortium partners (co-awarding) to associate partners (non-awarding) or supporters and simply providers of expertise (in the case of Romania). The main issues encountered are presented here, as well the solutions identified or abandoned. Particular efforts were made by some prospective consortium partners in lobbying for amendment of the respective national restrictive laws to enable the institutions to remain on board with the consortium, and with the remarkable involvement of the supporting border guard organisations important steps were taken in this direction (Estonia, Latvia).

## Description of the programme

The programme aims to advance and promote the highest standards in cooperation and interoperability at EU borders and the harmonisation of professional standards, as well as protecting and promoting fundamental rights within the border management and border control activities. It aims to empower European Border Guard managers to rely on and apply professional judgment by equipping them with knowledge and skills that are benchmarked and evidence-based, providing a stimulating and innovative environment for teaching, learning and research.

The Joint Master's had the opportunity to draw from the best expertise across the

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13 During the first iteration, 2015–2017, 27 border guard leaders from authorities with border management responsibilities within the EU and SAC (Austria Switzerland, Estonia, Spain Guardia Civil, Spain National Police, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the Partner Organization EU-Lisa) enrolled in the programme and 23 successfully graduated on 7 June 2017.

EU, valuing academic cooperation and student/teacher exchange, but also developing expertise in the border guard field through the degree programme's delivery and development of teachers.

The structure of a joint degree is well suited to achieving important outcomes for the learners, teaching institutions and operational agencies involved in this programme. It brings academic credibility to the expertise that exists in border guard (BG) organisations, fosters and enhances collaboration and cooperation across the EU and addresses challenges faced by BG organisations with a European solution, in a flexible learning paradigm that aligns with the training system of each MS and creates a standard for collaborative learning.

The academic standards of the programme are commensurate with the highest level of international developments in this sphere. The bringing together of the knowledge and experience of mid-high-level BG managers across Europe is designed to enrich the learning experience for all participants. An ethos of critical self-evaluation and peer review is fostered, ensuring the cross-fertilisation of European and international practice and encouraging a comparative approach to national practices (Frontex, 2015d).

The underlying rationale for this programme includes the strong demand for higher standards of education in the border management sector, in particular for education which is focused on skills and competences acquired through problem-solving in an applied professional context, as well as evidence-based knowledge developed in formal academic and disciplinary structures. The Master's Programme is completely learner centred, focusing on the relevance of the learning requirements for operational competences.

Learners are exposed to management practices in border security across the EU as each class has learners from every MS/SAC. The programme curriculum was designed and delivered by international experts from over 20 EU countries and international organisations involved in border security. The academic

institutions that form the consortium for the programme delivery benefit from mutual exchange processes that enhance theory and practice in the field of border management. The organisations and agencies responsible for border security/border guarding in each MS/SAC benefit through enhanced capacity for operational cooperation and interoperability at EU borders, which is also one of the key goals of Frontex. The students are offered an opportunity to learn in a context that reflects operational reality, to advance best practice in border guarding by studying together and to reinforce the European dimension of the BG job while contributing to the creation of a European BG culture at higher levels.

The programme is made up of 90 ECTS credits. One ECTS credit reflects 28 hours of student learning activity directly related to the programme outcomes. It is delivered over three Stages, each stage representing one semester of full-time study, carrying 30 ECTS credits. Stage 1 and 2 contain the taught component of the programme and Stage 3 is comprised solely of dissertation work. The programme also incorporates independent learning, an experiential learning element which is applied in the operational context and intensive contact sessions. The taught component comprises 8 modules of 5 ECTS credits each and 2 capstone modules by the end, each of 10 ECTS credits, one of which is dedicated to researching integrating management practices, preparing the students for the dissertation stage.

## Development process

### Principles of programme design

**Cooperation and collaboration:** the programme was developed in a collaborative framework, aiming to model and demonstrate cooperation in all its elements, from design, to delivery and to validation, from the consortium structure, to the learning experience offered to the students. A true joint curriculum was developed in collaboration, and not just by the institutions delivering the modules. The programme and the consortium structure show that we are not a “collection of institutions” delivering

individual modules, but a coherent joint degree, demonstrating “unity, not multiplicity”. A consultative process was set at all levels of the programme, from technical work to governance decisions, to reflect this principle in practice.

**A shared learning experience for the developers:** the challenges to all our systems are seen as an opportunity to explore the best way of doing joint degrees in a European context, aligning to the principles deriving from the Bologna process (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

**Inclusiveness:** the programme must offer flexible options and learning pathways to meet the needs of the target group. It must be accessible and relevant to all national border guard organisations in the EU.

**A “True” Joint degree:** Joint development, joint delivery, a joint award and joint validation. A programme meeting all legal and policy requirements of all consortium (awarding) partners, in line with Frontex Training values and ethos (Frontex, 2015c). Aware of the challenges of an innovative approach, the developers aimed to demonstrate that the Bologna process works in practice and that internationalisation of learning is not just a declarative ideal. Creating a true joint experience for the students leads to a joint award that – it was believed – truly reflects the values of the EU and the programme ethos, promoting a culture of jointness, cooperation, equality and respect for all the different academic traditions whilst reaching harmonisation.

**“Mini-university” system** – a shared governance structure with distributed roles across the consortium, ensuring an integrated management of the programme and shared quality assurance responsibilities that aim to demonstrate “unity”, not “multiplicity”, promoting a “culture of jointness” (EUA, 2006).

**Mobility and internationalisation:** teacher’s and student’s mobility is at the core of the programme, with teachers from over 15 countries and students from over 20 countries in the delivery. Each module board has a mixed composition of teaching staff from at least three institutions and usually members from outside of the consortium as well, as the programme has the opportunity to draw from the best expertise available in the EU, from both an academic and practitioner perspective.

**Peer learning and peer review:** not only do the teachers and students from a variety of cultural and professional background have the opportunity to work and study together, but also, the consortium promotes the principle of peer review and welcomes the involvement of external examiners and other peers in the review of any aspect of the degree programme and the consortium activities.

**Authentic learning experience** for the students: the learning outcomes as well as the learning and assessment strategies of the programme draw from the operational realities and aim at applying the theoretical models to a border security organisational context in order to improve practice.

**Sustainability:** the consortium is established for a period of 6 years (extendable) and covers three iterations. Given the significant resources necessary to establish such a construction, it is nevertheless open to involving further new academies and universities to enrich the resources available to the programme.

**Creating a new research field:** an opportunity created by this programme is the development and encouragement of practitioners’ research and the creation of a research community dedicated to border security<sup>14</sup> formed by teachers of this programme and students/alumni – the actual practitioners

14 It was noted by the accreditation panel in the evaluation report that there is a limited research base currently in the field of border management, which is reflected in the low number of PhD teachers of the programme (approx. 65%) The commitment of the programme developers to increase this rate was demonstrated not only through attracting more universities with well-known research traditions, but also through establishing a joint PhD initiative, a new project encouraging research in the new field of study created by this Master’s, along with the development of a set of level 8 learning outcomes of the SQF for Border Guarding, as a basis for the PhD study programme.

who learnt to apply the research tools and methods to the border management organisational realities, and thus improving the practice. In essence, this Master's programme establishes a new field of applied research in border management that is expected to be further explored by our alumni, teachers and students.

### Curriculum development

The learning outcomes of the programme were developed based on level 7 of the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding (SQF) that was validated across the EU, and thus ensuring that the learning standards are reflective of the operational requirements of all border guard organisations in the EU. The SQF is a European voluntary framework of high-level learning outcomes and occupational standards that describes the BG job at all levels and in all areas across the EU. It serves as a reference for the design of all courses and curricula in the BG field and is aligned to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 (Peres, 2017). Learning areas relevant for the Master's prospective learners emerged to be: strategic planning and evaluation, fundamental rights and ethics, cooperation in border security, leadership and organisational development, innovation and technology, strategic risk and threat management, global context of border security, EU policies, and ultimately, researching border management practices. The SQF level 7 learning outcomes are driving the award structure and the modular programme structure. The SQF competence profiles are an exceptional foundation framework to build a curriculum relevant to organisational learning requirements across the EU (Frontex, 2013).

The curriculum and the programme content were developed by a working group led by Frontex, comprising over 80 academics and BG experts from: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia,

Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and from the relevant Partner organisations (DCAF, EASO, UNHCR, INTERPOL and FRA<sup>15</sup>) to ensure the European dimension of the learning and of the product. The work continued for over 3 years to design the curriculum descriptors and handbooks that cover from the programme high-level learning outcomes, learning and assessment strategies down to session level and includes learning resources and workshops notes, in order to ensure consistency, coherency and self-sustainability of a curriculum that may be delivered by various lecturers and professionals over the years.

### Legal, awarding and policy framework

A process was set up and agreed with the project members operating at two levels: technical and governance level. At technical level, involving the experts, discussions were held at project group meetings and the experts were requested to check the proposals made with the national regulations at home and to identify the existing flexibility in the national regulations. Each working meeting would start by reports from the MS experts regarding the feasibility of the solutions designed. In the event of negative feedback, a new round of consultations would follow, seeking to create and verify new options, until a proposed parameter of the programme would be double checked, found feasible according to all national regulations and finally agreed by all members. In many cases the range of flexibility had been checked with the national agencies for quality assurance and accreditation, or at ministerial level; in more fortunate cases there were issues under the remit of the universities regulations that were permeable to adjustments in the interest and vision of the programme. A second higher level involved the governance actors, the decision makers (representatives of the Academic Councils) that were presented with the solutions agreed at technical level for their final endorsement.

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15 Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Geneva, European Asylum Office (EASO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)

The representatives of the prospective consortium partners organized in several working groups dedicated to the development of the Consortium Agreement, Policies and Procedures, Joint Awarding Agreement, Financial agreements and Joint Awarding Agreement worked together during 2011 – 2013 in monthly meetings of 2 – 3 days each, with 40 experts in total. Representatives of the accreditation agencies of the consortium countries and representatives of ministries of education (MoEd) joined two significant consultative meetings where the developers sought advice in an attempt to achieve solutions that would be in line with the national regulations and not compromise the programme standards and principles. Letters to MoEds were sent out by Frontex repeatedly, as well as by the national BG organizations, seeking to lobby for applying exceptions in the well-justified case of this joint degree. In some cases, these attempts were successful, as will be shown later.

By end of 2013 the legal framework of the programme was finalised, comprising: the Consortium Agreement<sup>16</sup>, Joint Awarding Agreement<sup>17</sup>, Policies and Procedures<sup>18</sup>: Quality Assurance Handbook, Teacher's Handbook, Student's Handbook, Teaching and assessment regulations, Dissertation procedure; and Financial Framework Master's Agreement.<sup>19</sup>

All documentation, including the programme curriculum was submitted to **a mock validation exercise** which resulted in a significant improvement of the QA system of the programme and of the Quality Assurance handbook and the related handbooks, based on the recommendations made

by the assessors, experienced independent experts in international QA and joint degrees trained by ECA.

## Accreditation

It is acknowledged that “the accreditation and quality assurance of joint programmes is a challenge for both the higher education institutions and the quality assurance agencies. The main apparent difficulty is the fact that the programme is organised by higher education institutions from different higher education systems and that each of these systems have their own systems of external quality assurance. This situation creates a burden for joint programmes that need to meet all the expectations arising from these different (and sometimes contradictory) national contexts and legal requirements” (ECA, 2013).

Aiming to support the simplification of the accreditation of joint programmes through a single procedure, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) developed an assessment methodology intended to replace the regular assessment frameworks of (national) accreditation bodies. Developed based on ECA principles on accreditation of joint programmes (ECA, 2007), this methodology aims to lead towards multiple accreditation decisions in all relevant countries based on one initial evaluation procedure (ECA, 2014).

The accreditation procedure of EJMSBM was coordinated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and performed under the ECA Assessment Framework for Joint Programmes

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16 Consortium Agreement: describes the obligations and responsibilities of the partners, the governing structure and the arrangements made for ensuring a smooth implementation of a quality programme including mechanisms for quality assurance and student protection; it was signed on 22 May 2014 between all partners;

17 Joint Awarding Agreement: describes the regulations and procedures for the joint parchment: diploma and diploma supplement;

18 Policies and Procedures: cover all rules and regulations that derive from the programme policies and curriculum standards that regulate all the processes, steps, roles and functions related to the programme delivery and quality assurance;

19 Financial Framework Master's Agreement : Frontex concluded with every Partner Institution and / or Complementary Entity the Financial Framework Master Agreement (FFMA), a document which defines the roles and responsibilities of Frontex and respective Institution or Entity as regards financial issues arising from the implementation of this Master's programme

in Single Accreditation Procedures<sup>20</sup> developed through the JOQAR<sup>21</sup> project. Within the single accreditation procedure, the joint programme was assessed as a whole.

The evaluation report was expected to lead to several national accreditation decisions, as the national accreditation agencies of the consortium would supposedly recognise and accredit the programme as well, without having to carry out their own national procedure. This did not work entirely as foreseen in practice, as subsequently most of the consortium partners had to resubmit the documentation in their own language for a national validation, although site visits were not considered necessary. However, all national agencies used as a reference the ECA report and took into consideration the initial recommendation for the programme to be accredited, issued by ECA and NVAO.

The Assessment report of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management indicates that "(...) this programme adheres to the demand for senior professionals who are strategic thinkers and have acquired the skills to address new solutions in the rapidly changing context of border management. (...) The panel considers this new academically-oriented joint Master programme thoroughly thought through, innovative, promising and welcomed by the professional field. (...) Academic aspects are addressed through real workplace scenarios and experiential learning" (ECA, 2015). "...A bravery" in attempting unique and important course development (...) of an "undoubtedly added value for border security", a programme that has been built on openness, honesty and collaboration". "A trail blazer for future joint degrees".<sup>22</sup>

## Consortium structure and quality assurance system

The institutions currently forming the consortium are: Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Rezekne Academy of Technologies

(Latvia), Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), University of Salamanca (Spain), National University for Distance-Learning Education (Spain) and the Netherlands Defence Academy. The Academic Partners work in close collaboration with the national border guard academies, the Complementary Institutions<sup>23</sup> (Academy of Guardia Civil Officers, Aranjuez, Academy of Spain National Police in Avila, State Border Guard College in Latvia, and Training and Excellence Centre of Royal Marechaussee Schiphol (The Netherlands).

The Academic Partners affirm and apply the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)* and are committed to promote a "culture of jointness" (EUA, 2006).

## Programme Quality Assurance framework

Designed as a true joint degree (equal partnership, network), the ethos and principles of the programme are reflected in the Consortium Agreement; therefore it is the consortium as a whole that is responsible for this programme. The Consortium has the capability to deliver a quality programme, it has structures in place to monitor and improve the programme, and to cope with any emerging difficulties.

The Consortium values the distributed nature of the degree programme and recognises that a single common set of policies and procedures must be developed and applied by all, to ensure an internally coherent and consistent system in line with each university's regulations, and to offer a harmonious academic experience to the students. It was acknowledged that no single institution has the expertise to deliver this entire programme and it was intended that

20 [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment\\_Framework\\_for\\_Joint\\_Programmes\\_in\\_Single\\_Accreditation\\_Procedures](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment_Framework_for_Joint_Programmes_in_Single_Accreditation_Procedures)

21 [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR\\_2010-2013](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR_2010-2013)

22 ECA Expert panel briefing on EJMSBM evaluation, Amsterdam, 3 December 2014

23 Complementary institutions are police academies and border guard training centres that support the connected Academic Partners and Frontex in delivering the programme by carrying out all organizational – logistical and administrative arrangements (transportation, accommodation, payments etc.).



the academic partners would share the programme delivery. The degree programme was intended to demonstrate “unity”, not “multiplicity”, so the Consortium in essence created a “mini university” structure for the programme that involves each partner at all governance levels. All partners implement the quality assurance procedures and cooperate and participate, in a manner appropriate to their respective roles, in these quality assurance procedures, sharing responsibilities as defined in the Consortium Agreement and subsequent programme regulations (Frontex, 2015a).

The consortium decides for each iteration of the Master’s on the programme delivery and the allocation of modules, ensuring a balance between academic partners. The consortium also aims to ensure that the programme is delivered in a fair manner to all students and that all partners behave in the same way in terms of assessments; that the same quality standards are applied across the programme by all partners and the student’s experience is at minimum the same as if they had completed the programme in one academic partner.

As a rule, there is one main delivering academic partner for each module throughout the duration of the Consortium Agreement (three iterations) as well as a backup partner (for the protection of students, ensuring that the consortium as a whole has the capacity to deliver the programme and mechanisms to cope with unexpected events). The composition of the module boards is relatively stable in all iterations of the degree programme, as the same core teaching staff is expected to be involved in the delivery throughout the three iterations, with the exception of the Module Convenor who is assigned by the delivering academic partner.

The quality-oriented implementation of the joint degree programme, as highlighted by the European Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in EU Joint Master’s Programmes (EUA, 2006) requires the observance of a number of key aspects:

- ♦ Cooperation on the principles of transparency, trust, inclusiveness, respect for diversity and honesty.

- Shared responsibility of all Consortium partners in analysing strengths and weaknesses in order to identify necessary fields for change and improvement.
- A distributed nature of the degree programme that is reflected in the distributed nature of the delivery, as well as in the quality assurance structure of the programme that identifies all partners in all governing roles and functions. It is acknowledged that no single institution has the expertise to deliver this entire programme and it is intended that the Consortium will share the programme delivery.
- Common agreement on a single set of regulations, policies and procedures that are suitable to this programme and serve its uniqueness, whilst being in line with each of the different institutions’ regulations.
- Commonly agreed quality principles that aim at ensuring that the student’s experience is at the same standards across the entire Consortium.
- Programme learning and assessment strategy that builds on the unique expertise that exists in the classroom and encourages peer learning, group work, formative assessments and learning opportunities
- Trustworthy communication between all partners.
- Sense of common ownership of the degree programme.
- Networked types of cooperation which ensure the broad involvement and participation of all relevant stakeholder groups.

In line with the European Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes (EUA 2006), quality is monitored at several levels such as programme and module, and focuses on four main pillars:

- learning outcomes, cohesion and structure of the curriculum;
- studyability of the Degree Programme;
- learning and assessment strategies of the programme, ensuring that they facilitate the achievement of the programme learning outcomes;
- the consistency of the programme delivery across all academic partners.

## Quality Assurance and Governing Structure of the Programme

The quality assurance structure and reporting lines is outlined in Figure 1.

The quality assurance structure of the Consortium creates a “mini-university” at the Consortium level, as said before, replicating all the necessary academic functions as performed by the Consortium, but tailored to Frontex business processes and regulations. The role, functions, composition and decision-making processes of each Board are described in the Consortium Agreement and in its annexes (Frontex, 2015a).

The Governance of the Consortium rests with an appointed *Governing Board* which is responsible for the implementation and quality assurance of the programme. The Governing Board acts as an Academic Council for the programme and it is representative of the Academic Councils of each of the Consortium members, as well as students’ representatives.

The *Programme Board* is the body responsible for monitoring, delivery and the implementation of the ongoing degree programme and is formed of all module convenors from all academic partners and students’ representatives, and it is chaired by a delegated member of the Governing Board.

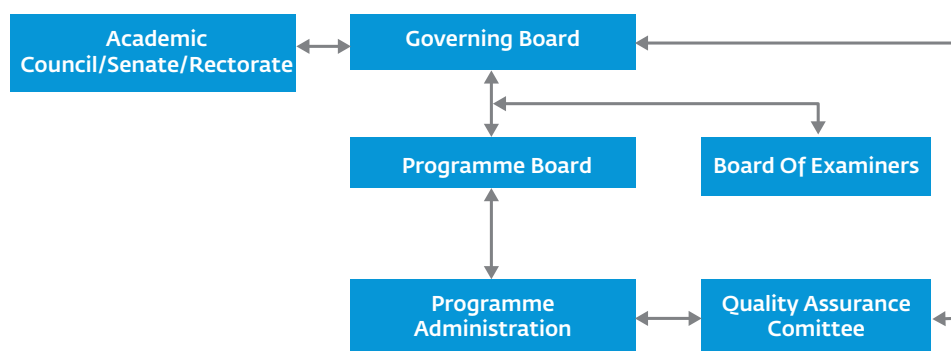
The *Programme Administration* ensured by Frontex is a key function providing the central administration of the programme, acting as a single point of contact for students and

teaching staff; it manages the whole academic process, including student records.

A *Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)*, chaired by a programme QA officer and comprising 3 module convenors from 3 different academic partners as well as student representatives is the body that undertakes periodic and regular reviews and oversees the overall quality assurance process, from modules to overall programme. The QAC is responsible for the implementation of policies and procedures relating to quality assurance, enhancement and internal review of quality, reviews the results of feedback submitted by the various stakeholders (such as students and teaching staff), makes recommendations for action where and when necessary and advises the Programme Board on matters relating to quality of provision, including preparation for programme review and enhancement. The QAC is responsible to conduct the final review and prepare for the re-validation of the programme.

*Board of Examiners*, formed of module convenors and external examiners and chaired by a delegated Governing Board member is the board that decides whether students have satisfactorily completed the Degree Programme requirements (Frontex, 2015 a). The Consortium recognises the traditions relating to peer review that exist amongst the academic partners, therefore the external examiners are central to the process of monitoring the reliability and validity of assessment procedures and academic standards and the consistency of the academic standards across the programme.

Figure 1



*Students' involvement* was agreed as critical for the quality monitoring and enhancement. Therefore student representation on the relevant consortium boards: Governing Board, Programme Board, including the QAC was actively promoted and their involvement in reality was substantial and highly beneficial for the programme's improvement, for the ongoing iteration, and for future iterations.

## Challenges and Issues

Before analysing the challenges encountered and discussing the solutions found, it is important to clarify the peculiar and unique nature of this programme that differs significantly from the usual joint degrees or Erasmus type exchange programmes.

### How is this programme different from the usual joint degrees?

Not only that numerous difficulties were encountered the inconsistent implementation of the Bologna principles at national level, as well as of the delays in the implementation of the Bucharest Communiqué (2012) on Joint degrees as it will be shown below, but also, the programme as such differs significantly from the usual joint degrees in a number of ways:

- In most joint degrees there are significantly fewer partners co-awarding; usually, one partner is leading the consortium and awarding, while the others are non-awarding delivering partners; in this case, it was aimed to have all delivering partners co-awarding, which required a significant amount of negotiations and agreements on the programme parameters, so that they fit each partner's national regulations, thus enabling the co-awarding. Also, there is no leading partner, all partners share the responsibilities equally, while Frontex is coordinating the consortium as a non-academic, non-delivering and non-awarding party of the consortium that is responsible for the central administration, coordination and implementation of the programmes regulations and procedures, as well as for the programme's full funding.

- Universities usually offer the whole programme or a significant portion of the programmes themselves, so the joint degree can build on the existing curricula. That may sometimes bring the risk of a fragmented experience for the student. In this case, no Master's in strategic border management or similar exists in Europe. The curriculum had to be drawn up from scratch, from the level 7 sectoral qualifications framework for border guarding sets of job competences and learning outcomes, as shown before. The programme learning outcomes were truly shared, as they were developed and agreed together by the curriculum working group; similarly, all modules were developed in collaboration and the whole curriculum is truly shared by the partners as the best resources of all partners and also international expertise external to the consortium could be engaged in designing the programme. In this way were the differences between partners academic traditions of teaching and assessment overcome in the framework of a collaborative approach and the result is an internally coherent programme curriculum.
- Students have a "home" university in normal joint degrees where their main point of contact lies, and there are exchange stages or modules designed as part of the programme which can be completed in another academic institution. In Frontex's case, students may come from 28 countries and they study by rotation each module in one of the six consortium partners in five different EU countries. Their central point of contact is Frontex for all programme administration and procedural inquiries. Furthermore, there is one appointed Programme Coordinator in each academic partner tasked to guide the student experience on the spot. All academic partners and Frontex apply the single set of procedures and regulations developed and agreed for the purpose of this programme, applying them throughout. The Partners do not apply their own specific regulations to this programme so as to ensure a coherent and consistent mobility experience for the students.

- ♦ Students usually complete their dissertations in their “home” university; the dissertation supervisors in this case come from all consortium partners, and a second supervisor from the work field is in most cases assigned. The blend of academics and practitioners is reflected throughout the programme up to the dissertation stage. The dissertation learning outcomes and regulations were also developed in a collaborative framework, so all dissertations were subjected to the same standards and guidelines, including marking rubrics and assessment schemes, unique and specific to this programme, as the supervisors would not apply their own “home university” dissertation standards. For the dissertation assessment, chairs of examination boards were invited from reputable academic institutions with research traditions from outside the consortium network, to ensure transparency, fairness and objectivity of assessments.
  - ♦ The grading system of the awarding leading partner is usually used, or each university uses their own grading system in the parts delivered by them, as the students register only with the “home university”. In this case, a common grading system was created and applied by the Consortium partners, and a national translation of the Consortium grades into the national grades of the awarding partners is provided through a mathematical formula; the diploma supplement comprises the Consortium grades as well as the national grades of the delivering awarding partner for each module.
  - ♦ The students are usually registered with their “home university” or with the leading awarding partner. In Frontex’s case, the students are registered with all awarding partners as they become all partners’ “own” students, and also with Frontex’s central administration.
  - ♦ Consortia tend to include similar providers; in Frontex’s case, the consortium includes a wide variety of institutions and cultures, from traditionally research oriented universities to police academies and defence institutes, as well as the coordinating body, which is an EU agency.
  - ♦ Students pay fees to the universities and their mobility stage is self-organised; in this case Frontex is funding all costs related to the programme – teacher and student mobility, teachers fee, examiners fees, all costs related to quality assurance, governance boards and related work, learning resources (books, subscriptions to online journals, etc.), as well as a Moodle platform hosted by Frontex and used to deliver and administer the programme. Furthermore, the complementary institutions (partner police academies that support the consortium on the basis of legal agreements with the Academic Partners and Frontex) carry out all organisational and logistical arrangements; all flights, accommodation, local transportation, meals, sport facilities etc. are provided to the students in all locations, so that their only concern should be their study and maintaining a work – study – life balance during the 18 months of this full time programme. The same facilities were offered to all 84 international teachers, lecturers and examiners involved in the first programme iteration, coming from over 15 countries, 20 universities, 8 BC/police academies and 5 international organisations, in addition to the six consortium academic institutions.
  - ♦ The intellectual property rights (IPR) to the materials belong usually to the universities or to the individual teachers. In this case, no material, from the highest-level learning outcomes down to a session descriptor was the result of an individual work or pre-existing as such in a formal university curriculum. All materials produced were developed in collaboration by international groups of experts, equally academics and practitioners, hence there is no individual ownership. The IPR of the programme and of the materials belong to Frontex, including the dissertations; however, all teachers and students are facilitated and encouraged to publish the work done in the context of the programme, upon prior approval.
- Given all these peculiar features of this programme, the question remained: “how to ensure the quality of the programme”, what

is the best and most suitable structure of the programme and of the consortium that would allow a true joint programme where the mobility and internationalisation are achieved in a manner most suitable to students and their learning, and the interests of the stakeholder's border guard organisations, the ultimate beneficiary.

### **Challenges encountered by the consortium, solutions identified**

The first important decision to be taken that had a major impact on the whole programme design was the type of consortium: one with a single leader that would have solved many issues regarding the multiple national accreditations or a truly joint network type consortium. The first case presented the advantage of having a less administrative burden, one single accreditation process and a programme that would run according to one country's national regulations – those of the awarding partner, while all the other associate partners would have only a delivery role. The governance and ownership of the programme would rest with the awarding partner that would be also solely responsible for the quality assurance of the programme. Although this was obviously the simplest and quickest solution, the project group led by Frontex did not choose this option, as it would have not been in line with the Frontex training strategy and values (Frontex, 2015c). The “true joint degree” – a joint programme with a joint award (JDAZ, 2015) required a significant amount of negotiations, agreements and creative ways of finding solutions to the incompatibilities of the national legislative frameworks, as well as financial resources to support the lengthy process; however, it was decided that, in the spirit of Bologna and of the European values promoted by all, that this option was worth pursuing. Accordingly, all partners accredit to all national requirements, and it

was hoped for a single accreditation procedure. The degree award identifies all consortium partners, as they are all co-awarding. The governance and quality assurance responsibility are shared as earlier described.

The prospective consortium members agreed to define as a consortium partner an institution that is entitled to co-award the degree. Therefore, the consortium identifies Academic Partners (awarding institutions), Associate Partners (academic partners, delivering, but non-awarding) and Complementary Partners (police academies and training centres in charge of organisational-administrative support for student and teacher mobility; they are also providers of professional expertise through their teaching staff, senior officers involved in teaching the more applied, practical subjects of the programme).

The prospective partners agreed to draw up a governance structure that would underpin the shared quality assurance system, reflecting the shared distribution of the programme and joint responsibilities, as earlier described. The shared responsibilities of the partners were agreed in respect to entry and admission, enrolment, progression, programme academic standards, quality assurance, policies and procedures regarding teaching staff, students, awarding, mobility, etc. The partners agreed the duration of the consortium agreement to cover three iterations of the programme, given the significant resources necessary to draw up the consortium agreement, and the terms of the renewal, exclusions, suspension, amendment, etc., that would enable the consortium to extend and include new academic partners<sup>24</sup>.

A peculiar issue regarding the consortium structure was raised by Estonia: a minimum share of 20% of the programme must

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<sup>24</sup> The flexible provisions enabled the consortium to open the doors to new partners earlier than the expiry of the consortium agreement. This was particularly important as one of the recommendations issued by the validation report was to increase the research base of the programme, i.a. by engaging more universities with a strong research background. Currently, there are pre-negotiations held at technical level with the University of Bologna and the University of Applied Sciences Vienna, given their expressed interest and their suitability to the programme goals.

be delivered by each partner, which would limit the consortium members to 5<sup>25</sup>. It was suggested that dissertation supervision could stand as 30 ECTS credits each, to complement the number of ECTS credits delivered through the modules; regretfully, this solution was not accepted by the Estonian Ministry of Education. Latvia had a similar requirement, however, less strict, for a minimum of 10% of programme delivery by each partner<sup>26</sup>. The dissertation option was accepted by the Latvian authorities though.

A number of issues emerged in relation to the academic standards of the programme in light of the joint awarding goal. One of the first issues encountered was related to the **number of programme ECTS** and number of learning hours per ECTS (ECTS Users Guide, 2015). As the target group consists of senior officers with strategic positions in their organisations who had to be temporarily released from their job, it is hard to expect that the BG stakeholders would commit their high-level staff for too long. The developers aimed to set a maximum number of 90 ECTS credits for the programme (that included 30 ECTS Dissertation stage), delivered full time, so that the organisational commitment will not exceed 1½ years. However, the wide range of differences in the number of learning hours per credit from each prospective Consortium partner at that time, ranging from 20 learning hours in Ireland to 28 learning hours in the Netherlands, imposed on the consortium the highest number as the consortium minimum. A total of 2520 learning hours in 18 months resulted in 8–10 hours of learning per day for the students employed during peak periods, which was quite a challenge<sup>27</sup> for even experienced practitioners advancing their studies in their own daily work field. The minimum contact time was decided and agreed to a minimum of approximately one fifth of the overall module contact time learning hours

per module given the specific requirements of several partners.

The 10 modules of the programme make 60 ECTS credits, out of which 8 modules contain 5 ECTS credits each and 2 capstone modules towards the end of the taught component of 10 ECTS credits each. Each module has a contact time of 40 learning hours out of a total of 140 learning hours dedicated to independent and experiential learning.

**The entry requirements** turned out to be a major obstacle in achieving the joint award and it was a very difficult issue for Estonia, Latvia, Romania, which have specified in their national legislation an acceptable “formula” of 3 + 2, or 4 + 1 (years) for a Bachelor’s and Master’s; the total number of Bachelor’s + Master’s credits being a minimum 300 ECTS, means in practice 240 + 60 or 180 + 240. The entry requirement of 240 ECTS credits would have excluded many learners from the EU countries where such Bachelor’s programmes do not exist anymore, whilst the 180 + 120 condition would have forced the programme designers to artificially add one semester to the programme, which was not at all in the interest of the learning or in the spirit of Bologna; moreover, it would have been against the interests of the sending organisations and ultimately detrimental to the whole idea of this programme being tailored to the needs of a very special target group.

The intention to be inclusive to all MS/SAC BG organisations’ potential students remained an uncompromising guiding principle and the developers made enormous efforts to find a way around this restriction. Options explored: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for entry of the extra 30 ECTS taught component – it turned out most countries do not have RPL instruments developed or stipulated by the law.

25 Universities Act, Passed by the Estonian Parliament 12, 119, Entry into force 18.02.1995 (12.01.1995, RT I 1995). Retrieved from <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/528122016005/consolide>

26 Law on Institutions of Higher Education, Passed by the Latvian Parliament, Entry into force 24.01.1997. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967>

27 After the first iteration, the developers decided based on students and other stakeholders feedback to introduce gaps between the modules and to consider offering the programme on a part time basis in the future.

Several letters to Ministries of Education and meetings were initiated by Frontex and the prospective consortium partners, to lobby for flexibility in relation to this specific joint degree, given the interests of border security in the context of the EU and Schengen agreements. The BG organisations of the three countries made substantial efforts to argue the importance of this programme for the national commitments to Frontex and the EU agenda on migration and borders; pressure was generated at political level by the respective governmental institutions. Ultimately, Latvia issued a specific government decree for the purpose of this programme to allow the exception<sup>28</sup>, while Estonia became a non-awarding Associate Partner and Romania withdrew.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – the intention was to grant as much RPL as possible, given that the target group is formed of experienced practitioners in line with the Bologna recommendations (Bergen Communiqué, 2005). Limitations arose under the Spanish legislation – a maximum of 15% of a programme can be subject to RPL<sup>29</sup> required reconsiderations of this matter. A maximum of 5 ECTS per stage was agreed to be subject to RPL on the most suitable modules; quick market research on existing programmes in the related fields led to the selection of the Global Context of Border Security, and Leadership and Organisational Development as being subject areas where our students most likely would be able to demonstrate prior formal, non-formal and informal learning at level 7. The auditing option was also included to maintain class interaction and engagement, peer learning throughout the programme, even though the RPL students are not required to take assessments.

**Pass mark and the common grading system.** After lengthy discussions and several

simulations, the partners agreed on a common grading system and grade descriptors. Extensive debates preceded a decision on the pass mark (eventually set at letter E, 50%). The possibility for a pass by compensation was suggested by Malta as an example of good practice, as well as the option of a 10% penalty for re-sit which was perceived as unfair by the other partners and rejected. The ratification of the grades by external examiners and a board of examiners was another controversial issue which posed problems for achieving a sensible programme schedule and was linked to the role of the external examiners. Communication of the grades to the students upon assessment or by the end of stage when the boards convene (impacting the resit schedule and policy for progression to the next stage), would depend on the grades' ratification or their provisional character. The issue was reviewed again after Malta left the consortium (due to organisational reasons) and a more flexible solution was found. It must be acknowledged that Malta was one of the most flexible countries with reasonable higher education legislation having enough provisions promoting the spirit and the essence of the QA principles of Bologna, and less caught up in formalities and bureaucracy; however, this particular issue seemed to be quite restrictive in their case.

**A number of issues related to the award** and the structure of the qualification also emerged. Firstly, the type of Master's: academic or professional. Initial discussions on a professional versus academic Master's were held, given that a professional Master's might have been more appropriate for the target group and more in line with the learning requirements. The irreconcilable differences between countries in relation to defining what a professional Master's is led to the abandoning of this option and the inclusion of more research-related learning

28 Law on Implementation of the Joint Master Study Programme "Strategic Border Management" passed by the Parliament of Latvia on 29 January 2015, published in "Latvijas Vēstnesis" no 29 (5347) on 11.02.2015. Retrieved from <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=272123>

29 Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (2015). Salamanca Outcome. Retrieved from [http://media.ehea.info/file/HEREES/73/1/OutcomePLA\\_QA\\_JP.final\\_632731.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/HEREES/73/1/OutcomePLA_QA_JP.final_632731.pdf)

to the programme to meet the standards for an academic degree (highest standards set by the Netherlands).

**The structure of the award** was another tough decision to make. It was intended to opt for exit qualifications as interim awards: 2 postgraduate certificates of 30 ECTS and one postgraduate diploma of 60 ECTS, again, in an attempt to design a programme that truly responds to the needs and specifics of this busy target group, creating options for flexible learning pathways. The concept of exit interim qualifications is not foreseen by the Spanish legislation. Curiously enough, the developers had already designed the curriculum based on autonomous learning outcomes for each stage, and a set of learning outcomes for the overall taught component, dedicated to the exit qualifications which ultimately served only to improving our course design skills.

Further on, the MA or MSc title was surprisingly an issue. Whilst such programme would be classified as an MSc in almost all countries, it turned out to be an MA in Estonia for the security field. The multiple degrees option was not in line with the consortium's intention for a joint award. The option to title it simply "Master's" was explored and eventually agreed, as it turned out feasible for all. However, the diploma supplement identifies the various titles in the national languages. Regulations regarding the length of the title had to be further considered.

**Classification of the award** became an issue as some universities strongly support academic competition. The developers, however, aimed and agreed to not classify the students' award in order to encourage cooperation, and not competition, according to the ethos of the programme. Spain still required introduction of a translation into the national classifications system on the diploma supplement only for the modules delivered in Spain.

**Specifications on the parchment and supplement.** There are very detailed requirements in each country specified in the law, making the joint award almost impossible.

This applies particularly in Romania where the requirements for the diploma are specified in the law. After a laborious process involving repeated checks and verifications with all involved institutions, the consortium partners finally achieved an agreement and all the national requirements stipulated in the national laws known at the time were reflected in the Joint Awarding Agreement before the submission to accreditation in June 2014. Six months before awarding the degree planned for June 2017, it turned out that the Dutch ENIC-NARIC requires on the award the title of the qualifications in the Dutch language, as well as an indication of the regulatory article (also on the parchment). Spain requires a special stick, countersignature and stamp on the back of the diploma – which suggests a move towards their own award as it was another institution's award that the Spanish university recognises. Repeated verifications and consultations with the relevant Spanish education and quality assurance authorities could not bring more clarity to this requirement, as it seems the concept of a joint award is not clearly specified in the Spanish higher education law, or differentiated from the multiple/double awards that are more of a common experience. Subsequently, two months before the graduation ceremony of the first cohort, the Joint Awarding Agreement and the Consortium Agreement were amended again to reflect these requirements and ensure that the award is legally valid.

## Lessons learnt, conclusions and recommendations

It must be said that for Frontex and the consortium partners all efforts paid off. From the 27 students enrolled in the first cohort of the programme, 23 graduated in June 2017 in Salamanca. The dissertations defended in March 2017 in Vilnius showed beyond doubt that the programme had reached its goals. The operational BG managers who started the programme 1½ years ago defended theses of an unquestionable value, from both an academic and professional point of view. The topics chosen were highly relevant for border security, ranging from comparing national technological systems, to assessing



the effectiveness of existing management practices; from reviewing the national integrated border management strategies in the context of the European concept, to assessing the feasibility of the new concept of the European border and coast guard agency; from analysing and comparing the various international missions and joint operations, to evaluating the psychosocial stress factors and recommending strategies for improving the well-being of the BG officers; from the influence of sharing criminal intelligence and risk analysis on the effectiveness of border control; to privacy and security concerns in modern border control systems; from coast guard cooperation between EU agencies, to the importance of international cooperation for efficient strategic border management.

Student feedback was also highly rewarding for the developers. Whilst the more critical feedback collected along the way was used to improve the programme on an ongoing basis, as well for the next iterations, the feedback provided by the end of the studies showed that the programme had reached the goal of creating a network of BG leaders who value European cooperation and can rely on each other to solve difficult situations at the borders. Therefore, an invaluable resource for the EU has been created, with strategic thinkers able to improve their national border management practices and make informed decisions that will reflect EU values and priorities.

These are just few statements of the alumni regarding the impact of the programme on their professional development, added to their appreciation for the quality of the teaching, the innovative approaches to learning, the field trips and practical sessions, and overall the quality of the student experience and support provided in the context of such a complex multi-national and multi-institutional setting: “This Master’s changed my understanding from a national perspective to the wider European dimension”; “We understand each other better now”; “We learnt to transfer the academic knowledge into practice in the field”; “Doing academic research increased my capacity to critically assess the situation at work”;

“It raised my cultural awareness, I learnt how the same problems are solved in different countries”; “We are a strong community – a living organism that is ready to create new strategies to address the EU border challenges”.

All the issues and challenges presented earlier are intended to serve as an illustration of the immense struggle that lies ahead for the HEIs who aim to stay true to the principles of Bologna and develop a joint programme that reflects its spirit and its pure essence. For the Frontex Master’s, it was possible ultimately to achieve this result thanks to the enthusiasm, idealism and persistence of those involved in the project, who pushed for choosing the hard way in the name of EU values and of the laudable goals of Bologna, but so scarcely underpinned by effective instruments and methodologies accepted nationally. It was thanks to the authentic spirit of cooperation and the shared values of the project members that “good” compromises were achieved and solutions found. It was also thanks to the trust and the sense of a European “family” built in years of working together that gave people the patience, the motivation and the energy to continue, despite all the seemingly insurmountable difficulties. It was the uncompromised ethics of the programme leaders from all partner institutions and sometimes a dose of constructive stubbornness and refusal to give up. It could not have happened without the political support and remarkable motivation of the BG organisations, the ultimate stakeholder and beneficiary, who joined efforts in lobbying for amendments of the national legislations. Last but not least, it must be mentioned that the substantial financial investment provided by Frontex that was willing to enable, facilitate and lead all these endless negotiations, hard work, meetings and consultations, and unwilling to compromise the values and ethos of this programme of a true European spirit, for the sake of a quick and cheap win.

Not all HEIs would be in the fortunate position of having a financing EU institution behind them and unconditional support from a key national stakeholder – as the border guard organisations in this case.

The obstacles arising from the differences in the university regulations were easier to overcome, given that the project members had the ability to understand the quality assurance principle behind the rule or procedure and opted for finding a different way to ensure the same principle is met, a common way applicable to all, a way that would be most suitable to the ethos of this programme and the particularities of the target group. There were many instances when we had to stop and go back to fundamental questions: “Who are our students?! How would they behave in the classroom, or in a given circumstance? What kinds of needs are they expected to have? What would suit their professional profile? What kinds of procedures would be most suitable for various particular cases, for *this* target group? What is not appropriate for this target group and how can we avoid an unnecessary burden for the students?”

It was noted by the evaluation panel upon accreditation that the programme seems to be overregulated and that the 5 kilograms of documentation might be too much for the students, programme staff and fluidity of the implementation. It was, however, necessary to foresee how each and every possible situation will be dealt with, who is in charge, what board or committee, who is appointing them, who are the members, what is their role, how they would make decisions and who will oversee and re-evaluate their decisions, if necessary. From extensions to absences, from plagiarism to appealing a grade, from grievance to changing dissertation topic etc., all these and many more had to be regulated by the consortium in a way that would suit the programme and the target and that would also be in line with all partners’ regulations. It was necessary also to leave enough flexibility for enabling the consortium to deal with unforeseen cases. It turned out that all these were absolutely necessary, in absence of a “default” set of university regulations that would be the case for the regular degree programmes. It was also acknowledged that some procedures were too complicated or not sufficiently specified; therefore, based on the stakeholder’s feedback, amendments

were made in view of the second iteration, for a smoother process.

In the case of the differences specified in the national law, obviously there was little room for manoeuvre and extreme cases where the law is changed for the purpose of one higher education programme are not expected to be a common or frequent experience, but a significant exception. It would be of unquestionable support to the HEIs attempting to develop joint degrees if only the general key requirements would be set in the law, while the more specific and detailed regulations would remain under the remit of the degree awarding institutions, the HEIs. Of course, it is acknowledged that there are various educational traditions and cultures in different countries and that these differences have in many cases reasonable justifications stemming from the national specifics, risk assessments, historical reasons, socio-economic factors, etc. These requirements are perfectly applicable to the national programmes and this should not be challenged – in our opinion. However, the transnational joint degrees are a different issue and in the name of international cooperation, mobility and transparency, treating joint degrees as exceptional cases and allowing for flexibility in well-justified cases would be an optimum solution to be envisaged. The example of the countries already doing so is commendable, treating their national programmes according to the national regulations, while treating the joint degrees in a more flexible, open manner, thus enabling transnational partnerships. European guidelines in this regard would be most welcome and necessary, to ensure that QA standards are properly maintained and that this most desired flexibility would not bring any risk of compromising the QA principles in the case of joint degrees.

The organisers of the Frontex Master’s can only hope that progress in this regard will be made in the near future and that all stakeholders, from the national QA agencies to policymakers at EU and national level, from the Ministries of Education to HEIs will join efforts in creating appropriate frameworks and means for their effective

implementation in practice. Looking ahead, unless something changes in the current landscape, it is expected that this Master's will be reaccredited 5 times during the next 3 years – which is quite an unreasonable situation that will require the organisers to direct massive focus, efforts and resources towards the procedural aspects of the reaccreditation exercises in five countries each and every year until 2021, to the detriment of the actual quality assurance and enhancement of the programme, and students' and stakeholders' interests.

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# Challenges for single accreditation of joint programmes: the case of European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management

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## Introduction

The development and initial accreditation of European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management was a really challenging activity, which required a lot of international effort and lasted almost 5 years. Even so, a joint programme while being a challenging form of provision, can also be extremely rewarding for all parties concerned – students, teachers, higher education institutions and employers.

Looking at the history of the Bologna Process it has really done a lot in respect of joint programmes' development and implementation within and outside the European Higher Education Area. Many European countries have by now included joint programmes in their national legislation. The question, however, is whether the introduction of joint programmes in national legislation is quite enough to meet the needs of single accreditation of joint programmes in practice. Unfortunately, quantitative and qualitative research data that would be useful is especially limited in relation to the particular challenges within the evaluation and accreditation procedures that are faced by quality assurance agencies and consortiums of joint programmes. However, it is still obvious that the most common practice regarding accreditation of joint programmes is that one joint programme has to undergo separate accreditation procedures in all the countries concerned. And

now the challenge is not to agree upon the need of a single accreditation procedure – it was already done by endorsement of the European Approach in 2015. Now the challenge is rather to find ways within the national legal frameworks to carry out single accreditation procedures. Two years after Yerevan, accreditation of joint programmes still continues to face challenges due to different regulatory frameworks and legislation of European countries.

## Differences of national legislation: the case of European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management

The statement that “... problems are mainly rooted in the different national legislations in Europe and the still existing heterogeneity of QA regimes in the countries concerned” (Heusser, Dittrich, 2010:5), published by ECA and the statement that “The different emphases and national requirements created problems as regards the joint programmes in the different countries as well as in finding common denominators for joint evaluation” (Hiltunen, 2012:11) published in the ENQA workshop report are still relevant and if we would change the date of these statements to “2017”, in some European countries it would be in line with reality. It could be grounded on the case of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management consortium

countries' existing legislation and other regulations in respect of the programmes' evaluation and accreditation procedures.

Our observations<sup>30</sup> on the national legal differences in the evaluation and accreditation procedure of the programmes proves that quality assurance agencies across Europe operate within different legal as well as cultural frameworks and that, in the view of the consortium, that they complicate and burden single accreditation of joint programmes in our consortium countries.

### Ability to choose a foreign quality assurance agency for the accreditation of a programme

Not all European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management consortium countries allow the possibility to choose a foreign quality assurance agency for the accreditation of any programme, including joint (see table 1).

Table 1. Ability to choose a foreign quality assurance agency (QAA)

<b>Lithuania</b>	YES	for evaluation, EQAR-registered QAA
<b>Latvia</b>	NO	
<b>Estonia</b>	YES	but has to be agreed by national QAA
<b>Netherlands</b>	YES	EQAR-registered QAA
<b>Spain</b>	NO	

Sources:

Law on Research and Higher Education, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, entry into force 30.04.2009.

Law on Institutions of Higher Education, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, entry into force 24.01.1997.

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation, approved by EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council on 01.04.2011, amended on 13.06.2012.

Dutch Higher Education and Research Act of 08.10.1992, passed by the Parliament of the Netherlands, entry into force 05.04.1993, last amended 01.09.2017.

Royal Decree 1393/2007 establishing the organisation of the official university courses, passed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain, entry into force 30.10.2007, amended on 03. 06. 2016.

In Latvia, there is not accreditation procedure of study programmes and only study fields are subject to accreditation procedures. Under Latvian legislation it is not allowed to choose a foreign agency for initial accreditation or subsequent re-accreditation of a programme. Accreditation of study fields is done only by Latvian Quality Agency for Higher Education.

In Spain only national agencies are allowed to evaluate and accredit a programme. For the re-accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, the consortium choice jointly selects a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency, as it is stated in the European Approach "If some of the cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level (e.g. programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory), then the cooperating institutions should select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies" (EA, 2015:2), is limited. The consortium is obliged to select Spanish agencies in order to comply with Spanish legislation.

It is obvious that for the real implementation of the European Approach it is necessary to make changes in national legislation in all Bologna Process involved countries, allowing higher education institutions to request evaluation and/or accreditation from suitable EQAR-registered agencies other than national, if not for all study programmes, at least for joint programmes it should be permitted.

### Recognition of accreditation in the event the programme is evaluated by a foreign agency

In the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management consortium countries only in the Netherlands is accreditation of the programme directly accepted if the agency is EQAR-registered. In Lithuania,

<sup>30</sup> Special thanks goes to the representatives of the consortium for contributing to the comparative study of legislation of consortium countries: Prof. Iveta Mietule, Maiko Martsik, Prof. Myriame Bollen, Assoc. Prof. Claribel de Castro Sanchez

Estonia and Spain approval by the national agency is mandatory, while in Latvia there are no regulations as yet (see table 2).

This is accompanied by the requirement, for instance, in Spain and Latvia, to submit a description of the curricula and additional documents of the programme only in the national language (!); in other words, the documents will need to be translated. The Spanish and Latvian partners of our consortium for the initial accreditation of the European Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management had to translate the description of programme curriculum and other documents, including the consortium agreement (!). It is quite an unjustified, disproportionate requirement in the framework of a joint programme developed by an international consortium, imposing an additional workload on the programme administration and academic staff. Therefore, we would like to see the necessary amendments in the operational procedures in respect of language, for accreditation of the joint programme, implemented by an international consortium.

Also, recognition of initial accreditation is accompanied by the requirement, for example in Lithuania and Latvia, to submit a description of the programme in the country approved programme description form, in other words the documents will need to be overwritten, copy-pasted and supplemented by additional information. It leads to unproductive duplication of efforts required from higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies as well. It creates hundreds of hours of additional unjustified work.

Taking into account the statement of the European Approach “Dependent on the national legal framework, the external quality assurance decision should come into force or be recognised in all countries where the programme is offered, as agreed in the Bucharest Communiqué” (EA, 2015:2), we, as stakeholders of the European Higher Education Area call for an increase in the mutual trust amongst ENQA-accredited and EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions on the quality of joint programmes

Table 2. **Recognition of accreditation of foreign QAA: direct or needs to be approved by national QAA**

<b>Lithuania</b>	Needs to be approved by national QAA
<b>Latvia</b>	There are no regulations
<b>Estonia</b>	Needs to be approved by national QAA
<b>Netherlands</b>	Direct NVAO decision, in case of EQAR-registered QAA
<b>Spain</b>	Needs to be approved by national QAA

Sources:

Law on Research and Higher Education, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, entry into force 30.04.2009.

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation, approved by EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council on 01.04.2011, amended on 13.06.2012.

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and revision of national requirements that hinder direct recognition of results and decisions of initial accreditation of ENQA-accredited and EQAR-registered agencies without raising any additional requirements to translate documents into the national language or submit them in different forms in each consortium country.

### **Differences in duration of the evaluation and accreditation procedure until the final decision in respect of programme accreditation**

In the European Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management consortium countries the duration of the evaluation and accreditation procedure in the case of the initial programme accreditation varies from 3 months to 1 year (see table 3), and in the case of the subsequent re-accreditation of the programme the duration of the evaluation and accreditation procedure varies from 5 months to 1 year (see table 4).

So, we have discussions on the “two-speed” EU policy, as described by some politicians; and I would say we have a “multi-speed” European Higher Education Area: in some countries procedures of programmes’ evaluation and accreditation are faster, and in some countries slower. The consequence of such variation is that the same joint

Table 3. Possible duration of the evaluation and accreditation procedure until the final decision (not including appeals procedure) in case of launching the new programme

<b>Lithuania</b>	Up to 3 months
<b>Latvia</b>	Up to 4 months
<b>Estonia</b>	Up to 5 months
<b>Netherlands</b>	Up to 6 months
<b>Spain</b>	Up to 1 year

Table 4. Possible duration of the evaluation and accreditation procedure until the final decision (not including appeals procedure) in case of programme re-accreditation

<b>Lithuania</b>	Up to 8 months
<b>Latvia</b>	Up to 6 months
<b>Estonia</b>	Up to 5 months
<b>Netherlands</b>	NVAO decides on accreditation within 3 months; evaluation starts in the previous year
<b>Spain</b>	Up to 1 year

programme in different consortium countries is legalised at different times. It leads to a situation where some consortium partners can't start the admission of students and implementation of joint programme right after the national accreditation, and are forced to wait for the legalisation of the programme in other consortium member countries. It is especially a stressful situation for consortiums in cases where development and implementation of joint programmes are funded by some public programmes as projects, which are strictly limited in time.

Thus, for the implementation of the European Approach on the ground it is vitally important to avoid different speeds of joint programme evaluation and accreditation in different European consortium countries.

### Fee for evaluation and accreditation procedure of joint programme

In the case of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, in Spain and in Lithuania evaluation and accreditation of any programme are

Table 5. The price for initial accreditation of programme

<b>Lithuania</b>	State paid
<b>Latvia</b>	2 761 EUR
<b>Estonia</b>	6 870 EUR
<b>Netherlands</b>	18 000 EUR
<b>Spain</b>	State paid

Sources:  
Price list for paid services of Academic information centre, Cabinet Regulation No.409, Republic of Latvia, adopted 14 July 2015

Initial assessment of study programme groups. Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education homepage.

NVAO Guidelines for initial accreditation applications, the Netherlands, 16.12. 2015.

Table 6. The price for programme re-accreditation

<b>Lithuania</b>	State paid
<b>Latvia</b>	Study field: 1 programme – 11 502 EUR; 2 programmes – 12 479 EUR; 3 programmes – 13 245 EUR; etc.
<b>Estonia</b>	6 870 EUR
<b>Netherlands</b>	NVAO fee: 820 euro; HEI hires agency for evaluation (approx. 18 000 euro)
<b>Spain</b>	State paid

Sources:  
Price list for paid services of Academic information centre, Cabinet Regulation No.409, Republic of Latvia, adopted 14 July 2015

Initial assessment of study programme groups. Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education homepage.

NVAO Guidelines for initial accreditation applications, the Netherlands, 16.12. 2015.

paid by the state. Except for cases where the programme is evaluated by a foreign quality assurance agency, Lithuanian higher education institutions have to pay from their own funds. In Latvia, Estonia and the Netherlands higher education institutions always pay from they own budgets. The prices vary from 2 761 EUR to 18 800 EUR (see tables 5 and 6).

In the case of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, for initial evaluation and accreditation to the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) for the evaluation procedure was paid – 2 000 EUR, to Latvia for licensing the programme 2 200 EUR and to the Netherlands for accreditation of the programme – 15 600 EUR. In total, 19 800 EUR was paid for initial accreditation of the



European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management.

Undoubtedly, this issue is relevant to all consortiums of joint programmes. We believe that the payment for a single accreditation of a joint programme should be single; the consortiums should not be obliged to pay twice, three or four times for the accreditation of the same joint programme for each country. The single accreditation procedure means reducing the workload of several quality assurance agencies in respect of evaluation and accreditation of the programme and means cost savings (!). Therefore, it is vital to discuss and search for a general mechanism in the European Higher Education Area in respect of the single fee which could be shared by all consortium partners for the single accreditation of a joint programme. It should be addressed at political level within the Bologna Process and governments must reach a political agreement, and not wait several years.

### Differences in possible accreditation term(-s) for each consortium country

All the challenges presented above may be more or less managed by an international

Table 7. Possible initial accreditation term(-s)

<b>Lithuania</b>	Length of the programme + 1 year
<b>Latvia</b>	Initial accreditation has an indefinite term
<b>Estonia</b>	3 or 6 or 7 years (HEI)
<b>Netherlands</b>	2 or 6 years
<b>Spain</b>	4 years + interim validation after 2 years

Sources:

Procedure for the External Assessment and Accreditation of Study Programmes, approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania, entry into force 29.07.2011.

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation, approved by EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council on 01.04.2011, amended on 13.06.2012.

Universities Act, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, entry into force 18.02.1995.

Standard of Higher Education, passed by the Government of the Republic of Estonia, entry into force 01.01.2009

Dutch Higher Education and Research Act of 08.10.1992, passed by the Parliament of the Netherlands, entry into force 05.04.1993, last amended 01.09.2017.

Royal Decree 1393/2007 establishing the organisation of the official university courses, passed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain, entry into force 30.10.2007, amended on 03. 06. 2016.

consortium. In spite of the challenges mentioned, the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management is now a reality, and is demonstrably successful for students and other stakeholders of the programme. However, the main pitfall that hinders single accreditation (to be precise the words subsequent re-accreditation should be used) of the joint programme is differences in the possible accreditation term(-s) for each consortium country.

In our consortium countries the possible accreditation term(-s) for initial accreditation of the programme is as follows: in Lithuania the possible accreditation term if the evaluation is positive is the length of the programme plus 1 year, e. g. if the programme total length is 3 years, the programme will be accredited for 4 years; in Latvia a new study direction initial accreditation has an indefinite term (but does not permit the granting of state recognised diplomas) and licensing of the new programme is limited by the actual accreditation of a particular study direction, in other words: the accreditation of the programme is valid until the end of accreditation of the study direction. In Estonia accreditation is up to 7 years, because

Table 8. Possible re-accreditation term(-s)

<b>Lithuania</b>	3 or 6 years
<b>Latvia</b>	2 or 6 years (study field)
<b>Estonia</b>	3 or 6 or 7 years (HEI)
<b>Netherlands</b>	2 or 6 years
<b>Spain</b>	4 years + interim validation after 2 years

Sources:

Procedure for the External Assessment and Accreditation of Study Programmes, approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania, entry into force 29.07.2011.

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Royal Decree 1393/2007 establishing the organisation of the official university courses, passed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain, entry into force 30.10.2007, amended on 03. 06. 2016.

the accreditation of a new programme is linked to the accreditation of an institution, in other words, the accreditation of the programme is valid until the end of accreditation of the institution. In the Netherlands, a new study programme might be accredited for 2 years as conditional accreditation or 6 years if the evaluation is positive, while in Spain a new Master's programme might be accredited for a maximum of 4 years with an obligatory interim review after 2 years, done by a national agency (see table 7).

And in the case of programme re-accreditation, the possible term(-s) are the same as in the case of initial accreditation, except for Lithuania and Latvia. In Lithuania, the programme might be accredited for 3 years as conditional accreditation or 6 years if the evaluation is positive. In Latvia, the study direction might be accredited for 2 years as conditional accreditation or 6 years if the evaluation is positive (see table 8).

### What are the consequences of such variations across the European countries in possible accreditation term(-s) for the joint programme implemented by an international consortium?

The situation in the case of our consortium is as follows: The European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management's initial accreditation was done by ECA in 2015 in coordination with the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and an accreditation for 6 years was issued. The programme description followed by the necessary documents together with the Assessment report done by an ECA

composed assessment panel were submitted to other national quality assurance agencies of consortium countries.

Although the programme was evaluated positively by all national quality assurance agencies, the agencies issued several national accreditations for different periods (see table 9) and therefore relinquished the ability to have the next single re-accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management due to different national legal contexts, in other words, due to differences in the possible accreditation term(-s).

In Lithuania, the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management as a new programme was accredited for 3 years, in Latvia it was accredited for 4 years until the expiry of accreditation of the study field to which the programme belongs. In the Netherlands, the programme was accredited for 6 years.

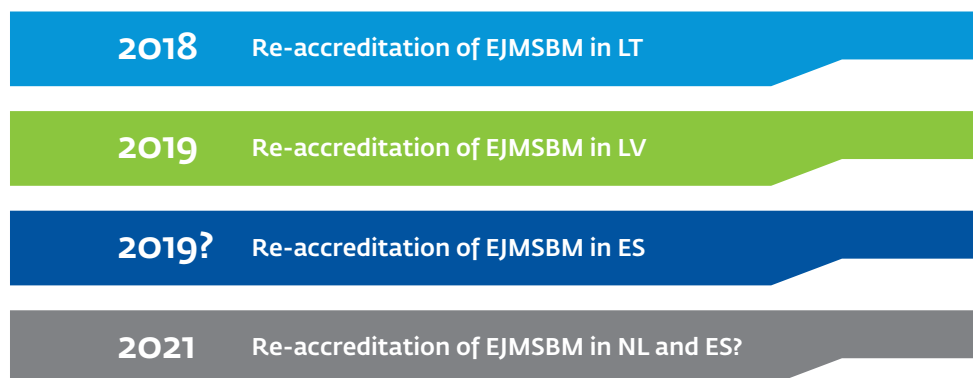
The situation in Spain is still unclear. The programme is officially registered; however, no official document with the term of the programme accreditation validity has been issued. The National Agency of Spain (ANECA) has not yet officially stated by e-mail that accreditation done by NVAO is recognised, including the term of accreditation of 6 years. Also, the answer to our enquiry was that the programme is not subject to interim review after 2 years under the Spanish legislation; everything that concerns the process of re-accreditation will have to follow the Dutch procedure.

However, since the accreditation decision is a statutory act and, thus bound to national

Table 9. National accreditations of European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management for different periods

Consortium partner and country	Agency	Decision on accreditation	Term of accreditation
Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)	3 years	01.06.2018
Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia	Higher Education Quality Agency (AIC)	4 years	04.06.2019
University of Salamanca, Spain National University for Distance-Learning Education, Spain	Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)/Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL)	4 years or 6 years?	?
Defence Academy of the Netherlands	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	6 years	28.05.2021

Figure 1. Re-accreditation deadlines of Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in different consortium countries



legal requirements, we are waiting for official confirmation from the Spanish Ministry of Education that in Spain the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management does not have to be bound to the national legal requirements in respect of its accreditation period. Until we receive confirmation, we will experience uncertainty in respect to the programme accreditation term in Spain.

Consequently, in our case until 2021 in accordance with the national criteria of each country we will have to do several joint self-evaluation reports as the programme is joint (see 1 picture). The first joint self-evaluation report will have to be done by the middle of 2018 for re-accreditation of the Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in Lithuania, the second joint self-evaluation report will have to be done by the middle of 2019 for re-accreditation of the Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in Latvia; perhaps the third joint self-evaluation report will have to be done by the middle of 2019 for re-accreditation of the Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in Spain, in the event it is accredited for 4 years, and the fourth joint self-evaluation report will have to be done by 2021 for re-accreditation of the Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management in the Netherlands and perhaps in Spain, if it is accredited in Spain for 6 years? And we will have several visits in different consortium countries, we will receive several reports of different assessment panels, and we

will have to follow up recommendations of several different expert panels which might be even contradictory to one another (!).

Furthermore, the following re-accreditation terms in each country will be different due to the differences already presented in the possible accreditation term(-s) and re-entering of the cycle from which there is no way out. The starting date of the re-accreditation differs per country and therefore the need for the next accreditation differs as well.

Hence, the main pitfall of the next single re-accreditation is the differences in accreditation deadlines per country. In order to be able to implement the programme, the consortium is burdened with separate countries' accreditation procedures, and self-evaluation reports need to be written almost every year.

Also, there is a hypothetical risk that multiple accreditation decisions do not point in the same direction. In Spain the accreditation decisions are of a binary nature (positive or negative) whilst in other consortium countries there is also another possibility – conditional accreditation (see table 10). This means that in one country a decision could be conditional, whilst in another country it could be either positive or negative, depending on how serious the shortcomings are perceived by that national quality assurance agency. Conflicting different decisions and/or recommendations can place the joint programme at risk.

Table 10. Possible accreditation decisions

<b>Lithuania</b>	Positive/conditional/negative
<b>Latvia</b>	Positive/conditional/negative
<b>Estonia</b>	Positive/conditional/negative
<b>Netherlands</b>	Positive/conditional/negative
<b>Spain</b>	Positive/negative

Sources:

Procedure for the External Assessment and Accreditation of Study Programmes, approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania, entry into force 29.07.2011.

Law on Institutions of Higher Education, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, entry into force 24.01.1997.

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Royal Decree 1393/2007 establishing the organisation of the official university courses, passed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain, entry into force 30.10.2007, amended on 03. 06. 2016.

These represent a significant burden on higher education institutions and the consortium, and hamper the effective and efficient implementation of the joint programme.

Undoubtedly, many more examples from other consortiums can be given. The Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management is just one example which can easily be complemented by other examples. Since the conference is attended by representatives from other consortiums, I’m sure that tomorrow during the group discussion sessions we will hear of other examples in differences of accreditation periods.

A comparative study of consortium countries’ legal requirements for programme accreditation shows that the differences in the possible accreditation term(-s), differences in nature of decisions (positive/conditional/negative), and diversity in higher education systems (with a focus on programme or study field or institutional accreditation) set by the national legislation of each country are the main obstacles for implementation of the European Approach. Although the European Approach provides a solution by stating that “The joint programme should be reviewed periodically every 6 years, which should be specified in the published decision. If there is an accreditation decision it should be granted – if the decision is positive – for a period of 6 years” (EA, 2015:6). However, the reality

shows that 2 years after Yerevan there are no changes on the ground in the national legislation of European countries in respect of single accreditation of joint programmes. Implementation of the European Approach is impossible without revision of national legislation, regulations and policies that inhibit the single accreditation of joint programmes. The solution requires some exceptions in the national legislation of each country in respect of joint programmes’ single accreditation.

## Conclusions

A number of projects have been initiated to investigate and tackle problems with the setting up, quality assurance and recognition of joint programmes. Much has been done through the initiatives of European associations in higher education: EUA, ENQA, ECA, EQAR, etc. Those projects (EUA, 2006; ECA, 2010; 2013; ENQA, 2012; EC, 2012; JOI-MAN Network, 2012; EQAR, 2014; etc.) have shown that progress has been made and that there are many regulations and tools in place which can be used to facilitate the process of single accreditation of joint programmes. However, even though the European Approach was endorsed by Education ministers on paper, in most countries, in practice (!) quite a few obstacles still exist.

It is necessary, considering the experiences of EHEA stakeholders from different national contexts and fields of activities, to continue discussion of these issues:

- What challenges are faced by stakeholders of European Higher Education Area in evaluation and accreditation of joint programmes from their point of view?
- What particular steps are necessary by quality assurance agencies and European associations in higher education promoting the debate on single accreditation together with other key national and international stakeholders in the Bologna Process?
- What kind of amendments on the ground have to be made in a national legal and operational/procedural framework for the implementation of the European Approach in the time remaining until the first re-accreditation of European Joint

Master's programme in Strategic Border Management and the next Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Paris in May 2018?

- ♦ What issues need to be addressed to Education Ministries and/or Parliaments of the European Higher Education Area?

Therefore, the work on implementation of the European Approach needs to be continued and problems can be overcome only by a joint effort of all stakeholders involved (higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies, associations, governments) and by adequate political and legislative actions. Implementation of the European Approach, however, requires coordinated actions by ministries, quality assurance agencies and international consortiums of joint programmes.

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**3**  
**CONFERENCE  
SESSIONS**

## 3.1 Accreditation practices of joint programmes around European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management

### Accreditation Practices of Joint Programmes in Lithuania

**Nora Skaburskienė**

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The topic of the development and quality assurance of joint programmes is very important. The issue has been discussed for several years now. And it is not only about the development of such programmes, but about the difficulties that emerge during their implementation.

Currently Lithuanian higher education institutions running more than 1 500 study programmes. Only 38 of these are joint study programmes (Table 1).

Most of joint programmes are of Master level, and one fourth is developed in Colleges of Higher Education. The majority of the joint programmes are developed in Social Sciences (Figure 1).

There are certain national legal requirements applied to these type of studies:

- All participating higher education institutions must have a right to conduct studies of a respective type (Bachelor, Master)/field;
- A joint programme may be implemented after its legal registration/accreditation in all participating countries;

- Entering level of foreign language should be stipulated;
- The content of a joint programme has to be developed by all partners;
- The mobility of students and lecturers is a compulsory part of the studies;
- A significant part of a joint programme should be mobile.

In the course of last year mobility issues were discussed. Suggestions on applying virtual mobility instead of physical mobility were presented. But finally, a decision was taken that the physical mobility model should be a compulsory part of this kind of study program, as this would give more benefits to students – an international environment, multicultural interaction, etc.

Legal acts also stipulate certain requirements for agreement between partners. Every agreement regarding joint programmes should stipulate at least the:

- Responsibility of the partners in implementation process;
- Conditions for implementation of studies;
- Financing conditions;



- ♦ Means of student support;
- ♦ Award of qualifications.

The development of joint programmes had its peak in 2014 in Lithuania, as support from EU Structural Funds was provided for the development and implementation of such programmes (Table 2).

Partners from neighbouring countries are most common in the development of joint programmes (Latvia, Estonia, Poland); however, there are also partnerships with more distant countries, such as Portugal and South Korea (Figure 2).

Until now the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) has evaluated eight joint programmes (evaluation of the first programme took place in 2012).

Each programme must be evaluated according to the following evaluation areas:

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes
2. Curriculum design
3. Teaching staff
4. Facilities and learning resources
5. Study process and students' performance assessment
6. Programme management

A programme can be accredited for 6 or 3 years. An accreditation decision can also be made on the basis of an evaluation report of another EQAR-registered agency, but the report:

- ♦ Needs to have a table with an evaluation score for each evaluation area;
- ♦ Each area should be graded according to a 4 point scale.

Last year SKVC did an analysis of evaluation reports of joint programmes. The following issues were highlighted by the experts:

- ♦ Failure to ensure compliance with legal requirements;
- ♦ Insufficient information about the assessment methods and systems for assessing learning achievements used in other countries;
- ♦ Problems in the administration of study programmes of this type;
- ♦ Vague relationships with partners;
- ♦ Insufficient student mobility;

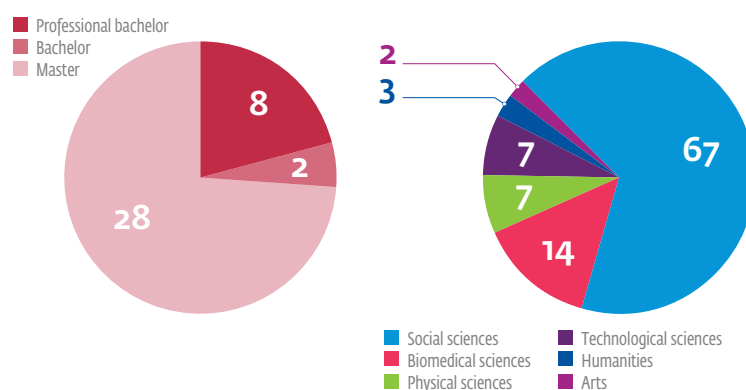
Table 1.

	Number of joint programmes	Total number of programmes
Professional bachelor	8	431
Bachelor	2	577
Master	28	648
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1 656</b>

Table 2.

	2014	2015	2016
Professional bachelor	6	-	-
Bachelor	2	2	-
Master	11	5	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>

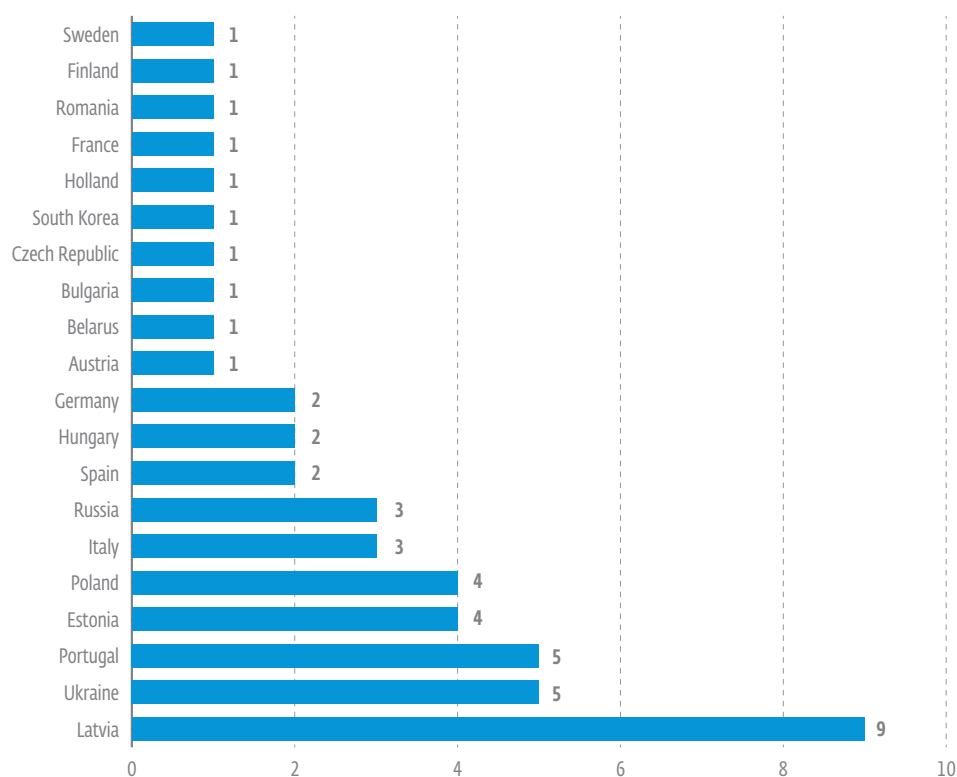
Figure 1.



- ♦ Lack of housing and support for students;
- ♦ High dropout rates;
- ♦ Unequal professional development opportunities for teachers;
- ♦ Inconsistent coordination of study programme goals, expected learning outcomes and programme curriculum.

SKVC made efforts to perform a joint evaluation (accreditation) procedure with other quality assurance agencies. We expected to have one common procedure together with the quality assurance agencies of the countries involved, including common agreed criteria, one expert team, one site visit, one report, and one decision on accreditation recognized by all agencies. These were our expectations at the beginning of the process. But what transpired in reality? In all the cases, the evolution was implemented only by SKVC. Cooperation with foreign

Figure 2.



quality assurance agencies usually was limited to the nomination of the peers. In all cases in which we sent our final reports to other quality assurance agencies, we received no responses.

To sum up, there are a number of unanswered questions regarding the common procedure of evaluation of joint programmes:

- ♦ Initiation, coordination of the evaluation procedure: Which agency should be responsible? Who covers the evaluation costs? The period of accreditation?
- ♦ Liaison with the authorities in other countries regarding the legality of higher education institutions and the joint programme, accreditation requirements, etc. Whose responsibility is this?
- ♦ Agreement on evaluation criteria, requirements for (joint) programmes in all countries, requirements for the self-evaluation report, peer team composition, training, place for site-visit, requirements for reporting, etc. Who should lead the process?

Joint programmes are not only part of the national higher education framework – they belong to the European level of higher education as they run between countries and must meet the requirements of several countries.

In 2015 the Ministers of Education agreed on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, but it is not working, because until now there has been no common agreement on the procedures on how a European approach should be implemented. Countries, including my own, are still attached to national requirements. If European countries value joint efforts to promote commonly offered studies, they have to look beyond their own interests and allow more freedom in the requirements for joint programmes.

Next year Lithuania is moving to evaluation and accreditation of a study field instead of a single programme. This means that if joint programmes are not taken out of the national context, they will disappear among other programmes during evaluation of the whole study field.

# Accreditation Practices of Joint Programmes in Latvia

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## Development of Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Latvia

Latvia was one of the first countries to establish a quality assurance system and higher education quality assurance agency (AIKNC) performed programme and institutional accreditation from as early as 1994. In 2012, when the second round of the accreditations started, the Ministry of Education and Science in relation to the reforms of higher education transferred the quality assurance activities from the AIKNC to the ministry itself.

In November 2014 the Latvian Government decided to set up a new independent quality assurance agency for higher education (AIKA). This agency is to operate in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines. AIKA must also become a full member of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The government chose the independent, non-profit foundation Academic Information Centre (further AIC) to take up the task to establish the new quality assurance agency as an autonomous department of AIC. All the departments of AIC are linked to higher education. Besides the function of the Latvian Quality Assurance Agency (AIKA), other parts of AIC are the Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre, the Information point for recognition in, the Latvian National Europass Centre, as well as the “Study in Latvia” office.

AIKA was established in March 2015 and became fully operational in July of 2015. AIKA is a new agency, and has developed rapidly due to several important growth factors. Firstly, it was important that the establishment of AIKA took place at the time of finalisation and approval of the ESG-2015. Thus, the new agency implemented directly the new ESG version. Secondly, the new agency (AIKA) was able to build on the experience and knowledge taken from the expert pool and database of the previous agency (AIKNC).

AIKA is autonomous and is recognized as a higher education quality assurance agency, set up to improve the Latvian higher education external quality assurance system, which should operate in accordance with the ESG and promote the quality, visibility and international recognition of Latvian higher education. The scope of the quality assurance agency covers the entire Latvian higher education system: both state and private HEIs, and from short cycle programmes to doctoral studies.

Before AIKA started working, the Law on Institutions of Higher Education was amended and new Government Regulations were adopted on July 14, 2015, which introduces into the national legislation the principles of the new version of ESG adopted by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area in May 2015 in Yerevan. Minor additional amendments were also made in 2017.

With a view to becoming a full member of ENQA and an EQAR agency, the Latvian Government granted both Latvian state funds and European Social Funds to the “The

Support for Meeting the Requirements Set for EQAR Agency” project (further “project”) to support the new agency to train staff, experts, higher education institutions and stakeholders, develop methodology and strengthen the tools of the agency.

As to internationalisation, the agency has enjoyed affiliate membership of ENQA since April 2015 and full membership of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA) since 2015, the Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) since 2016 and European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) since 2017. In addition, the informal network of the Baltic countries is a good platform to exchange experience.

AIKA also cooperates with other agencies of EHEA countries and beyond. For instance, AIKA has invited the Lithuanian agency (SKVC) as a partner in the implementation of the AIKA strengthening EU Social fund project; AIKA employees participate as panel members in agency reviews; submits Latvian experts upon requests of agencies of other countries; requests suitable experts for reviews in Latvia; AIKA invites experts in expert exchanges; AIKA carried out a joint review with another agency; and AIKA exchanges information and training experience.

## Legal requirements for joint programmes in Latvia

**Developing the joint programme.** Latvian higher education institutions are entitled to establish joint programmes and to issue joint degrees together with other accredited Latvian higher education institutions, as well as with foreign partner institution(s) that should be recognised in their own country. To be sure about the status of a potential partner institution, the relevant information can be received through ENIC/NARIC centres.

In order to secure the quality of the joint programmes, the requirements of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (further *Law*) should be met. The requirements

on establishing, implementing and quality assurance of the joint programmes are stipulated in the Law Section 55<sup>1</sup> and the Cabinet Regulations No 407 and No 408 regarding the licencing and accreditation accordingly. The partner institutions should develop the joint programme together. While developing the joint programme, partner institutions should ensure that all parts of the programmes are of the appropriate level, i.e. if the joint programme is a Bachelor programme, it should not include a subject course from the partners should not include offer the from the subject course from a short cycle programme. Similarly, if the joint programme is a Master’s level programme, all the parts of the programme should be of Master level. The sharing of the joint programmes can be different. However, the share of each partner institution should be as a minimum 10% of the entire volume of the joint programme. All the partner institutions should together develop the internal quality assurance system of the joint programme.

Regarding the final examinations, granting of degrees or qualification requirements, these should be applied in all partner institutions with a view for the joint programme to together form unified content and consecutive.

**Requirements on mobility in joint programmes.** According to Latvian Law on HEIs, mobility should be ensured for students who study in joint programmes, which also allows the acquisition of a commensurate and essential part of the joint programme in one or several partner institutions. As regards the mobility of teaching staff, it should be ensured that they are able to teach also at least at one partner institution.

**Licensing of the joint programme.** As in a number of other EHEA countries, in Latvia the licensing of the programmes is needed before implementation of the programme is started. Licensing is an ex-ante assessment. The next step of quality assurance is the accreditation of the groups of related programmes (“accreditation of study directions” in Latvian legal jargon). Licensing

of a new programme is an external quality assurance activity carried out to determine the potential quality of a new study programme in order for permission to be granted to start programme implementation and enrolment of students.

In the case of licencing of a joint programme, the parts of the programme for which the Latvian partner institution(s) is in charge have to undergo the Latvian licencing procedure. As regards the parts of the joint programme for which the foreign partner institution(s) is in charge, the Latvian quality assurance agency should receive evidence that the foreign partner institution(s) and/or their programmes are recognised in their country(-ies).

#### **Accreditation of the joint programme.**

When accreditation of the group of programmes to which the joint programme belongs, the foreign partner HEIs should submit documents from their quality assurance agencies to evidence that the joint programme is recognised in their relevant countries.

The parts of the joint programme delivered in the foreign HEI(s) should be recognised under the legislation of the relevant country(-ies).

### **Opening doors for EQAR-registered agencies as solution for joint programmes in Latvia**

It is visible that the current Latvian legislation on joint programmes is too detailed and too focused on the Latvian angle only. If all or some of the partner countries are as detailed, the joint programmes will simply not be possible. So, it is clear that the clauses on joint degrees in the Law should be amended.

A new positive development has occurred this year. The Latvian Government has approved and submitted to the Parliament for adoption an amendment to the Law of Higher Education which allows higher education institutions to choose EQAR-registered agencies to operate in Latvia from January 1, 2018. This is a step forward and, among other changes, an opportunity to agree on one single EQAR registered agency to evaluate a joint programme.

## Accreditation Practices of Joint Programmes in The Netherlands

**Mark Frederiks**

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*May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

In the Netherlands accreditation of higher education programmes (Bachelor's, Master's, and Associate Degrees) is the sole responsibility of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). NVAO has been set up by the governments of the Netherlands and Flanders and is responsible for accreditation and institutional reviews in both the Netherlands and Flanders. This paper is focused only on the accreditation of joint programmes in the Netherlands.

In 2016 NVAO completed some 500 reviews of which 335 took place in the Netherlands. These 335 Dutch reviews included 3 institutional audits, 72 accreditations of new programmes and 260 accreditations of existing programmes. It is unknown how many of these accreditations refer to joint programmes as double and multiple degrees are not counted separately. Only if the accredited programme leads to a joint degree is this included as a joint degree in the database. There are only a few dozen joint degrees. The number of joint programmes is estimated to be less than 200 or 5% of the total number of Bachelor's and Master's programmes in higher education.

The accreditation of joint programmes has been an important international issue for NVAO ever since its existence. Dutch higher education institutions have been involved in many joint programmes, and also have a high success rate in obtaining EU funding for Erasmus Mundus/Erasmus+ joint

programmes. These joint programmes were in the past only double or multiple degree programmes. As the European Commission emphasised the awarding of joint degrees in the selection for EU funded projects, this was one of the arguments used for introducing joint degrees in Dutch legislation in 2010. This legislation made it also possible that a joint degree may be awarded to a graduation track within an accredited programme, thereby enabling the programme to offer both a single degree (for regular students) and a joint degree (for students enrolled in the graduation track participating in the joint programme).<sup>31</sup> For joint degrees NVAO uses a protocol that is based on the Dutch regulations regarding joint degrees. There are NVAO joint degree protocols for new and existing programmes (including the possibility of awarding joint degrees for graduation tracks within these programmes). A requirement in these protocols is that the consortium has signed a cooperation agreement that makes the distribution of responsibilities between the partner institutions clear. Another requirement is that the Dutch institution contribute “substantially” to the consortium. Although there is no quantitative indicator for what “substantial” means, it does enable the refusal of a joint degree if the Dutch institution contributes only a few ECTS to the joint programme. For awarding a joint degree it is also required that the joint programme be offered at at least two locations, although this requirement is not upheld for national joint degrees (e.g. involving two

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nvaov.com/recent/publications/protocol-joint-degree>

Dutch institutions in the same city or region). Furthermore, joint degrees can only be awarded by recognised HEIs, cooperation between a public and a private Dutch HEI is not possible, and the joint programme needs to be designated as either academic or professional (in accordance with the Dutch binary system). Dutch HEIs often see the protocols as an impediment to establishing joint degrees; hence efforts are made to simplify these regulations which are set by the Ministry.

The joint degree protocols do take into account the efforts made with regard to the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions for joint programmes. NVAO has put a lot of effort into working on mutual recognition, most notably by coordinating projects of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA).<sup>32</sup> An important ECA project regarding joint programmes was JOQAR, the acronym for “Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded”.<sup>33</sup> This EU funded project included the development of a common European framework for the assessment of joint programmes, which was tested in four pilot accreditation procedures. The cornerstone of this approach was one single accreditation procedure (instead of multiple ones in each of the countries of the joint programme consortium) and acceptance of the outcomes of the single procedures in all countries of the consortium, resulting in national accreditation decisions without an additional assessment. This acceptance across countries was exemplified by the development in 2010 of a multilateral mutual recognition agreement regarding the accreditation results of joint programmes (MULTRA). The essence of MULTRA is that each of the signatory agencies accepts the accreditation results regarding joint programmes of other signatory agencies. As a consequence, only one accreditation procedure for a joint programme

is needed and other agencies can base their own national decisions on the results of this procedure without setting up their own national procedures. Because of MULTRA, the NVAO could accredit a handful of joint programmes without an additional assessment as these joint programmes were already accredited in Austria, Germany, and Spain.

The European framework developed by ECA in the JOQAR project was used by NVAO in 2014 for the assessment of the European Joint Master’s in Strategic Border Management. In line with the framework the QA agencies of the countries involved were invited to send an observer for a site visit (which one of the agencies did) and to specify any additional criteria that had to be taken into account. The applicant was the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) which, in cooperation with Frontex and five academic partners, applied for NVAO accreditation of this new programme. In May 2015 NVAO made a positive accreditation decision for this joint programme leading to the award of a joint degree.<sup>34</sup> The NVAO accreditation is valid until 28 May 2021.

The ECA/JOQAR framework was also used as input for the development of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes which was adopted by the EHEA Ministers in Yerevan, likewise in May 2015. In June 2016 NVAO accredited the first joint programme using the framework of the European Approach, i.e. the professional Bachelor’s joint programme “International Teacher Education for Primary Schools (ITeps), provided by Stenden University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) in cooperation with University College of South East Norway (Norway) and University College Zealand (Denmark).<sup>35</sup>

As said before, NVAO has for a considerable period of time been investing in mutual recognition of accreditation of joint

<sup>32</sup> <http://ecahe.eu/>

<sup>33</sup> [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR\\_2010-2013](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR_2010-2013)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nvao.com/opleidingen/nederland/european-joint-master%E2%80%99s-strategic-border-management>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.nvao.com/opleidingen/nederland/international-teacher-education-primary-schools-iteps-joint-programme>

programmes as a way to facilitate the accreditation of joint programmes, and thereby contribute to the internationalisation of Dutch higher education. Currently NVAO can accredit a joint programme that is co-offered by a Dutch institution without any additional assessment when the joint programme has been accredited by a QA agency:

- ♦ that is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and if for the assessment the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was followed;

- ♦ that has signed the “Multilateral Agreements on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results” (MULTRA)
- ♦ or that falls under the responsibility of the German Accreditation Council, with which NVAO has signed a mutual recognition agreement.

NVAO has accredited joint programmes on the basis of each of the three agreements. However, the expectation is that the European Approach will develop further into a successful attempt to simplify accreditation of joint programmes.



# Accreditation Practices of Joint Programmes in Spain

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## Spanish context

In order to understand the Spanish system and the possible difficulties encountered when applying the European Approach, it is necessary to know how the former works. The Spanish higher education system is regulated by Royal Decree 1393/2007, governing the planning of official education. This regulation is very clear as to how Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes must be applied in order to be granted official recognition and to maintain it. All programmes must apply for initial accreditation (verification) in order to be awarded official recognition and, once this has officially been conferred, universities must apply for renewal of accreditation of their programmes after 8 years in the case of 360 ECTS Bachelor's degrees; 7 years in the case of 300 ECTS Bachelor's degree and 6 years in the case of 240 ECTS Bachelor's degrees and PhDs. For Master's, renewal must be sought within 4 years of initial accreditation. In the intervening period, programmes may propose modifications to the accredited programmes, which are then monitored by a quality assurance agency in higher education.

There are several stages of programme evaluation and accreditation (see picture 1), which consist of sub-stages:

Stages for achieving official recognition (initial accreditation):

1. Universities must apply to the Spanish University Council for recognition of a programme as official.

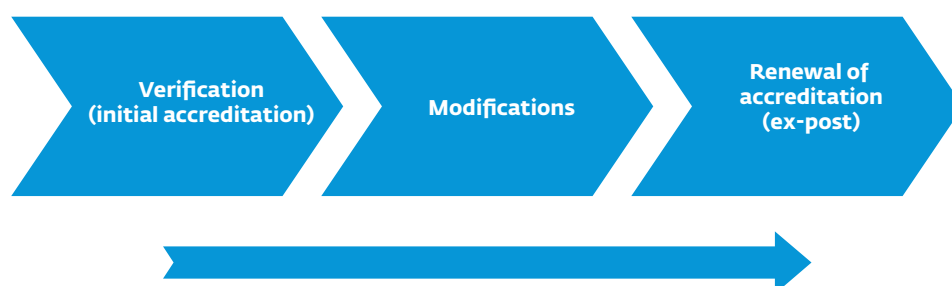
2. The programme is evaluated by an accredited quality assurance agency in higher education (EQAR- registered agency).
3. The programme must be authorized by the autonomous region where the university is located.
4. The Spanish government establishes the official status of the programme and its inscription in the Register of Universities, Centres and Programmes (RUCT).
5. The study programmes are published in the official bulletin.

Stages for modifications:

1. Universities must apply to the Spanish University Council for any modifications that are to be made to an official programme.
2. The programme is evaluated by an accredited quality assurance agency in higher education (EQAR- registered agency).
3. Authorization is granted by the autonomous region (e.g. Castilla y León regional legislation).
4. The national government is informed of the assessment result.
5. Modifications are registered with the RUCT.

Stages for renewal of accreditation:

1. Application to the regional authorities.
2. Evaluation of the programme by a quality assurance agency in higher education.
3. The agency gives notification of the assessment result.
4. The Spanish University Council takes a decision.
5. Renewal of accreditation is registered with the RUCT.



Picture 1. **Stages of programme evaluation and accreditation**

As can be seen in all the processes to which degrees in Spain wishing to obtain and maintain their official status are subject, the Spanish higher education system is extremely guarantee-based and exercises substantial control with regard to official degrees. Nevertheless, what is quite surprising is that current legislation fails to provide the same control for joint programmes. The same Royal Decree governing the planning of official education establishes that a joint programme be understood as “A study programme designed by two or more HEIs, Spanish or foreign, that have signed a collaboration agreement and that have submitted a single application for verification (initial accreditation).”

The same decree establishes the requirements that joint programmes must fulfil in order to achieve official recognition. These requirements are:

- ♦ There must be an agreement between institutions that wish to propose the joint programme. The agreement should include the procedure for modification of extinction of the study programme as well as which institution will be responsible for:
- ♦ The safekeeping of student records
- ♦ Awarding and registering the degree
- ♦ Institutions must include the following in the study programme proposal:
- ♦ If a foreign higher education institution is involved, accreditation of recognition by the competent authorities must be provided.
- ♦ Application for initial accreditation (verification).

An application for initial accreditation can only be submitted by a Spanish university

and must follow the same procedure as any other programme and fulfil the criteria set out in the Royal Decree.

In addition to national legislation, all programmes involving a university located in Castilla y León, the autonomous region in which ACSUCYL operates, must comply with regional legislation in the case of joint programmes. Thus, *Decree 64/2013, regulating official university degrees in Castilla y León (Bachelor and Master)* establishes that the region should authorize each programme involving any university in the region as well as any modification of an official programme that affects the agreement between the institutions. In addition, a financial report must be sent which gauges the impact of any changes.

In Castilla y León there are 553 official programmes of which 64 are joint programmes; 37 coordinated by universities in Castilla y León; 27 in which universities of Castilla y León are involved and nine in which foreign HEIs are involved: eight coordinated by universities in Castilla y León and one in the FRONTEX programme. Therefore, there is little experience in Castilla y León as regards joint programmes. All joint programmes in Castilla y León obtained official recognition before 2013 and therefore there is no experience of using the European Approach.

### **European Approach – Spanish regulation**

Spanish regulations establish the criteria against which programmes must be evaluated in order to achieve official recognition. All accredited agencies must apply the

same criteria for evaluation. These criteria are in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The European Approach follows the same criteria and therefore there is no problem in this sense when applying it to evaluating joint programmes.

Even though the criteria for evaluation are quite similar to those used in the Spanish evaluation system, at the present time there is no possibility of automatic recognition (!) of a programme evaluated by a foreign agency since the programme must inevitably be approved by the Spanish University Council and authorized by the corresponding regional government. Therefore, any Spanish university involved in the joint programme must apply for evaluation in a similar manner as it would have to were it a single programme, in addition to which it must follow the same procedure as set out for any other programme. The first problem arises with the manner in which the study programme is presented in Spain, as there is a *database with a specific format that all programmes must fulfil* in order to be registered for evaluation and be granted official recognition. The second problem can arise with the *specific rules established for ECTS recognition*. Regulations set out certain specific rules that all programmes must meet. The third problem may be the *ECTS per programme*;

Bachelor's degrees in Spain are 240 ECTS and in most of the EHEA are 180 ECTS. Not many 180 ECTS programmes have been authorized in Spain due to an internal rule. In the case of Castilla y León, there cannot be any 180 ECTS programme if there is no agreement between all the universities offering the same programme, and in all of them it will be with the same ECTS. One more problem is the *periodicity for re-accreditation*, as the European Approach is every 6 years and in Spain in the case of a Master's it should be every 4 years. Another stumbling block might involve *modifications of a joint programme*. The European Approach envisages the possibility of modifications and, if so, the agency must be informed. In Spain, modifying a programme means a new evaluation following the evaluation procedure, which is the same as for initial accreditation.

## Conclusion

In Spain, there is still no consensus as to how to implement the European Approach; to some extent the criteria are the same, but Spanish regulations involve a great deal of red tape. There is a need to change at a national level and achieve a common understanding at European level (EHEA). Nevertheless, the European Approach is a good framework to work with.

# Accreditation Practices of Joint Programmes in Estonia

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## Current situation regarding the joint programmes in Estonia

Currently, there are 23 joint study programmes in six higher education institutions (HEIs) in Estonia. Fourteen of these programmes have been launched in collaboration with local partner HEIs and 9 with foreign partner HEIs. The majority of the joint programmes have been opened in the field of arts, performing arts, teacher training and social/political sciences.

The legal framework for opening a new joint programme was established in clause 22<sup>1</sup> of the Universities Act which lists the necessary formal and quality requirements the joint curriculum has to fulfil. Clause 22<sup>2</sup> of the Universities Act sets out the requirements for joint curriculum cooperation contract.

In order to open a new joint programme, the HEI has to submit to the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) a written application to register a joint programme. Then, conformity of the application to legal requirements is assessed by the Ministry. The MER may involve the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) to conduct an expert assessment of the programme if the written application is not sufficient to determine the quality of the programme. After the expertise has been conducted by the MER and/or EKKA, the joint programme shall either be entered or not entered in the Estonian Education Information System.

After a joint programme has been opened, its quality is assessed in a similar manner to

other study programmes. As there is no separate programme accreditation in Estonia, all joint programmes (in which the leading partner is an Estonian HEI) undergo a quality assessment of study programme groups, an enhancement-based evaluation, during which interviews are conducted with representatives of all the partners of the joint programme. International collaboration with other quality assurance agencies during the evaluation process of international joint programmes is a definite area for improvement in Estonia – more efforts should be made by EKKA to organize joint assessments with other quality assurance agencies in the event joint programmes are implemented with foreign partners.

## Legal challenges of opening new joint programmes in Estonia

In 2014 – 2015 accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management took place. In the course of the accreditation process, serious challenges preventing smooth international cooperation were found in the Estonian legal framework. As a result, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences could not attain the status of an Awarding Partner in the consortium.

The following legal complications were highlighted in the accreditation report:

1. There is a requirement in clause 22<sup>1</sup>(6) of the Estonian Universities Act that the combined duration of the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes should be no less than 5 years /300 ECTS. This rule was not compatible with the duration of the

programme (1½ years and 90 ECTS), and admission requirement (an EQF level 6 qualification of at least 180 ECTS).

2. Another requirement of the Universities Act is that at least 20% of the curriculum should be provided by a partner institution, which meant that there could not be more than five academic partners awarding the joint degree whilst the consortium had six academic partners.

The unexpected outcome of the accreditation process prompted a discussion between EKKA and the MER regarding the interpretation of the Universities Act. EKKA proposed to the MER a more flexible interpretation of the 20% requirement. According to EKKA's suggestion, the requirement, established by the Universities Act that a substantial part of the joint curriculum shall be implemented at another educational institution collaborating in the joint programme, could be met through § 3 of the Standard of Higher Education, and consequently this requirement would be deemed as met by combining the study load of actual instruction at an educational institution (i.e. the provision of courses) with the full study load of a thesis which a student has completed under that programme. This interpretation was based on the presumption that the full study load of the thesis would be considered as part of the study load of instruction provided by each participating HEI, because all HEIs involved in the joint programme would be participating in the defence of the thesis. However, the MER was of the opinion that it is impossible to separate the study load completed in the course of producing the thesis from the study load of the rest of the study programme, and therefore found that each HEIs substantial part should be calculated based on the total study load of that curriculum. The MER found it impossible to justify the argument that all HEIs contribute 30 ECTS-credits to the completion of the thesis merely by conducting a defence of the thesis, because a thesis is largely the result of a student's independent work.

## New developments regarding the joint programmes in Estonia

Following the accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management and subsequent discussions with EKKA, the MER asked for EKKA's input regarding possible changes in legislation.

In December 2016 EKKA forwarded to the Ministry the following suggestions for making the legal regulation of joint programmes more flexible and compatible with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes:

1. Abandoning the 5 years requirement for the combined duration of Bachelor's and Master's programmes, as this is not a common practice in other European countries.
2. Abandoning the requirement that at least 20% of the curriculum be provided by a partner institution, as it has proven to be too restrictive.
3. Reducing the level of detail in requirements for joint curriculum cooperation contract, leaving these matters up to the partners to decide.
4. Allowing for specificities on legislative level regarding the volume of ECTS for Master's thesis etc., for joint curricula – these matters could instead be regulated in the joint curriculum cooperation contract.

Currently, these suggestions are being processed in the MER and will hopefully be at least partially included in the new Code of Higher Education. In March 2017 a discussion round took place in the MER, where it was agreed to reduce the level of detail in requirements for joint programmes, leaving these matters for the partners to decide in the cooperation contract.

The discussion shall continue...

## 3.2 Two years after Yerevan: progress so far

### University perspectives to quality assurance of joint programmes

**Tia Loukkola**

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The European University Association (EUA) has in the past worked on the joint programme in the context of different projects. These include:

- ♦ EUA Joint Masters Project (2002 – 2004)
- ♦ EMNEM – European Masters New Evaluation Methodology 2006, the result of which we published in the *Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master's Programmes*, which are still quite often being referred to when discussing the internal quality assurance of joint programmes
- ♦ At least two EUA surveys have covered questions on joint programmes
  - Master Programme in Europe 2008–2009
  - Trends studies (most recently in 2010 and 2015, next in 2018)

In addition, EUA as the representative body of universities in Europe is active in various policy debates that are linked to joint programmes; for example, in external quality assurance (QA) arrangements and recognition of qualifications. You may be asking yourself, why am I including here projects

that date back a number of years, but I trust the answer will become clear to you later during this short lecture.

The topic of this conference is the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (hereinafter the Approach) and therefore the primary focus is on how the external QA of these programmes is organised. However, I was asked to speak from the university perspective in my presentation and therefore I will cover both internal and external QA of these programmes, because it is our belief at EUA that these are interlinked and should be two sides of the same coin.

But let us first take a step back to 2015 when the Approach was adopted. In that same year EUA's Trends report found that of the higher education institutions (HEIs) that offer joint programmes with institutions in other countries, 37% offer them at Bachelor level, 70% at Master level, and 44% at Doctoral level. Eighteen per cent of the Trends respondents did not offer joint programmes at all. These figures were very similar to the

results of the Master programme survey from 7 years earlier.

Trends 2015 further noted that joint programmes have been the focus of attention of the Bologna Follow-Up Group that had been working on the Approach and that this was “welcome, but the survey results indicated that the universities are more concerned about anchoring these programmes institutionally and making them sustainable, than about the external QA requirements”. Only in two countries (Greece and Slovakia) did more than half of the respondents answer that they found QA to be very challenging for the development of joint programmes. The integration of programmes into the institution was reported as the main challenge overall, reflecting a finding that EUA had already made in its 2004 study.

It was against this background that EUA was supportive of the Approach and actively contributed to various consultations in order to provide comments to the ad-hoc group in charge of developing the document. We were supportive of making the external QA procedures lighter; today’s example of the *European Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management* demonstrates better than I ever could what the combination of different national programme accreditation regulations can lead to at their worst, and clearly illustrates the challenges that HEIs face in this regard.

However, I would like to point out that in systems where HEIs are “self-accrediting” or the external QA is focused at institutional level, these kinds of challenges do not appear. Therefore, if I want to be provocative, I could claim that these challenges could also have been dealt with by all European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries moving to external QA systems at institutional level, rather than at programme level. But we all know that for various political reasons this is not likely. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are higher education systems in the EHEA where there is no programme accreditation and therefore the Approach does not in practice apply to HEIs operating in these systems. The

importance of the Approach not leading to additional work for these HEIs was one of the key points for which EUA advocated.

From the university perspective, the benefits of the Approach are pretty obvious: there would be only one external QA procedure for the whole programme and only one set of criteria (outlined in the Approach) against which the programme would be judged. The Approach would also allow the consortium in charge of the programme to choose a QA agency that best fits the needs of the programme, as long as the agency is listed in EQAR. Also, we find the emphasis on the “jointness” in the programme valuable: this would encourage the consortium to consider what the added value of a joint programme is in comparison to a regular programme.

But then again, the question to be asked is whether using this procedure would put at risk the recognition of the qualifications awarded by the programme? We know from experience that the credibility and the academic quality of joint programmes are at times already questioned and there is a potential risk that if a programme is no longer expected to fulfil all national criteria, this may make the qualification even more suspicious. This question is relevant because the Master’s study survey concluded that the course coordination in joint programmes is often challenging, not least due to incongruent national legislation on variable entry points, credit weighting, workloads and learning outcomes. The presentation of challenges faced by the consortium of the *European Joint Master’s programme in Strategic Border Management* shows us that this is still very much the case. But in this context, it is good to remember that not all these regulations are linked solely to programme accreditation.

While our focus here is very much on the impact that external QA requirements have on the development of joint programmes, I would like to remind us all that, as it reads in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, the main responsibility for the quality assurance of provision lies with HEIs. This applies to joint programmes as well: regardless

of the external QA arrangements, the consortium in charge of implementing a joint programme needs to take this responsibility seriously and invest in internal QA procedures that ensure and enhance the quality of the programme in a robust manner and in line with the ESC Part 1. This should always be the basis of any external QA. The other challenges faced by HEIs beyond external QA, which I have mentioned earlier in this presentation, just underline the importance of establishing internal QA that accommodates the expectations of each of the joint programme consortium members. Any external QA should be based on checking that the consortium is doing what it promises and is accountable to its various stakeholders.

The Approach was adopted 2 years ago. When preparing this input I asked myself, what new could I say here because, as we have heard from the previous speakers, the take up of the Approach has been very slow. Systems that allow the use of the Approach in the external QA of joint programmes are rare, and we have very few examples of QA

procedures having been carried out using the Approach. But perhaps this is indeed a good reason for us to be talking about this here and now: to remind all parties of the commitment made in Yerevan 2 years ago and to try to see how the Approach can be made a reality.

To put it bluntly, from the university perspective, the first step to really make use of the Approach is for systems where programme accreditation is a compulsory form of external QA to decide that the Approach can replace their usual national requirements. Before that happens, the Approach will not have a major impact and will make no difference to HEIs.

Finally, if there really is a willingness to promote joint programmes in Europe, we definitely need to resolve the issues around the multiple external QA processes that such a programme may be subject to, but we also need to engage the recognition community in this process in order to ensure that a student who enrolls in a joint programme can be certain that the qualification is recognised.



# The View of EQAR

**Colin Tück**

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In 2015 European ministers of higher education agreed on a coherent, European approach for quality-assuring joint programmes. Will it save academics and managers from headaches when thinking how to have their joint programme accredited? And to what extent has it been implemented 2 years after the Yerevan Ministerial Conference?

## How has external quality assurance of joint programmes worked so far?

Joint programmes have been regarded as a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) ever since the Bologna Process was conceived. They enshrine “the necessary European dimensions in higher education” at all levels the Bologna Declaration (1999) called for: “curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes”.

External quality assurance has, however, for long been infamous as a major obstacle: too often joint programmes had to undergo multiple accreditations, by the different national quality assurance agencies of the countries involved, each looking at the bits and pieces happening in their country. The burden on institutions was heavy and such fragmented reviews did not capture the “jointness” of these programmes, neglecting their essence, as the European University Association (EUA) described in its 2015 Trends Report.

## Why was the European Approach developed?

Already in 2012, European ministers of higher education recognised that external

quality assurance of joint programmes needed to be simplified. To that end, they agreed to “recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes” (Bucharest Communiqué).

There was never doubt that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) apply to joint programmes as much as to all higher education provision in the EHEA, and this would thus seem to be a logical step. However, governments felt a need to get more specific and spell out what the ESG means in the specific case of joint programmes. The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) gave that task to a small ad-hoc expert group, which then drafted the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, adopted by ministers in 2015.

## What is the European Approach about?

Quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions had already earlier developed and tested numerous approaches for single, integrated external quality assurance procedures. Yet, national regulations from all different countries had to be incorporated; otherwise an accreditation decision or evaluation report would not be recognised everywhere. Differences in those national requirements made matters complicated: for instance, contradictory requirements in different European countries as to the number of ECTS credits assigned to a final Master thesis.

The European Approach includes a set of agreed standards for joint programmes, based only on the ESG and the Qualifications

Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Adopting the European Approach, ministers made crystal clear that the standards are “based on the agreed tools of the EHEA” and they should be used “without applying additional national criteria”.

The European Approach further includes an agreed external quality assurance procedure. Where programmes require external evaluation or accreditation at programme level, this should be carried out by a suitable EQAR-registered agency identified by the cooperating institutions. As a consequence, quality assurance should get less burdensome and do justice to a joint programme’s nature: integrated, truly European curricula – reviewed in an integrated, truly European quality assurance process.

### Where is the European Approach available?

Like all agreements made in the Bologna Process, the adoption of the European Approach is a political declaration, but not a legally binding agreement. Thus, it requires further action at the national level to turn it into reality.

For the implementation of the European Approach, the most important distinction is between:

- a. countries where external quality assurance at the programme level (e.g. programme accreditation) is mandatory, and
- b. countries where mandatory external quality assurance is at the institutional level only (e.g. institutional audit, system accreditation).

In the latter case, higher education institutions are typically autonomous in approving their own study programmes and organising internal quality assurance of

their programmes. In doing so, they may use the European Approach if they so wish, and there is thus usually<sup>36</sup> no need for legislative changes at national level. In case A, however, legislative changes are usually required, so that a single accreditation or evaluation based on the European Approach is recognised within the obligatory external quality assurance system, that is, instead of the obligatory accreditation/evaluation according to the national process and criteria that would otherwise be required.

The majority of EHEA countries, namely 34,<sup>37</sup> fall within category A. Only 7<sup>38</sup> countries are purely case B, while the remaining 7<sup>39</sup> countries are “mixed”. That is, programme accreditation/evaluation is mandatory for some higher education institutions only (e.g. for university colleges, but not for universities) or higher education institutions can choose between accreditation of single programmes and the institutional quality assurance system.

Two years after being adopted, the European Approach is in principle available to all institutions 12 higher education systems, and to some institutions in another 13 systems (see Illustration 1). From amongst case A above, Armenia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Denmark, Liechtenstein and the Netherlands allow the European Approach to be used for mandatory programme accreditation. In Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Portugal, Poland, Romania and Slovenia programme accreditation based on the European Approach is possible for some institutions or under specific conditions. However, in most of these countries this possibility is based on general regulations for the recognition of external quality assurance by EQAR-registered agencies, which often predate the European Approach. In Austria, Bosnia and

<sup>36</sup> In theory it would be conceivable that national regulations or external quality assurance criteria (applied in institutional accreditation /evaluation / audit) effectively prevent the use of the European Approach by institutions. To date, however, no such case is known to the author.

<sup>37</sup> AD, AL, AM, AZ, BG, BY, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FR, GE, GR, HR, HU, IS, IT, KZ, LI, LT, LU, LV, MD, ME, MK, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SE, SI, SK, UA

<sup>38</sup> BA, CH, FI, MT, TR, VA, UK

<sup>39</sup> AT, BE, DE, DK, IE, NL, NO

- European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes available to all higher education institutions (as explained in text)
- European Approach available to some higher education institutions or only under specific conditions
- European Approach not available to higher education institutions in the country

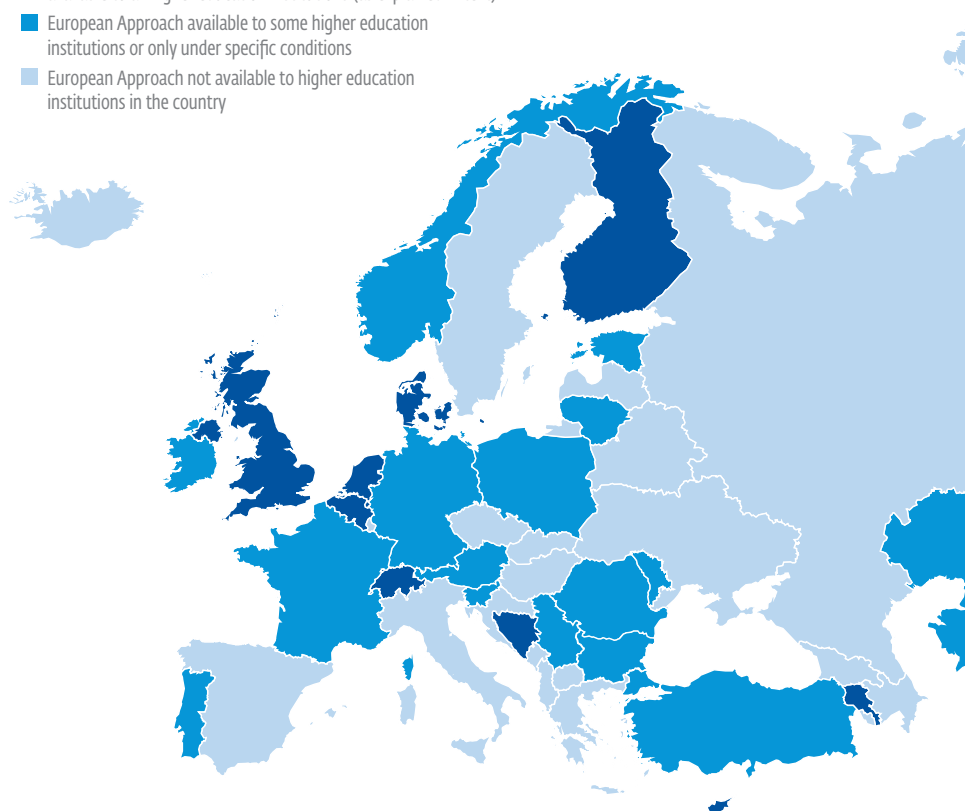


Figure 1. Availability of the European Approach

Herzegovina, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK, all or some higher education institutions are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level only (case B), the European Approach is thus available to them by virtue of the higher education institutions' autonomy in their internal quality assurance.

### Why is the European Approach not available in other countries?

In those countries where programme accreditation/evaluation is required, making the European Approach available to higher education institutions typically requires legislative changes. From the discussions at various meetings, seminars and conferences on the topic since Yerevan, it can be observed that national governments are hesitant to change laws or regulations, and to create an exception for joint programmes.

Joint programmes, however, remain a relatively small phenomenon: only 1% of the EQAR-registered agencies' programme evaluations/accreditations are of joint programmes. This might explain why there is no huge sense of urgency to address this rather specific topic.

It also appears that there is uneasiness with the possibility that a joint programme might not comply with all specific national criteria that are imposed on "regular" programmes. However, where national criteria are narrower than the European framework, they are often structural rather than quality-related, e.g. imposing strict numbers of credits for certain modules or components.

Last but not least, the European Approach is not yet widely known amongst higher education institutions in Europe. However, only where higher education institutions are aware and actively demand the right to

use the European Approach is it likely that the necessary changes will be launched.

### **Is implementation unusually slow?**

While joint programmes are often presented as a hallmark of the Bologna Process, the European Approach is only available to all higher education institutions in about a quarter of the European Higher Education Area countries. This might look like a disappointing picture 2 years after Yerevan.

But when comparing the European Approach with other agreements made in the Bologna Process, it has to be borne in mind that no action line, commitment or instrument was ever implemented across the EHEA within 2 years.

The ESG were agreed in 2005. Now, 12 years later, still only 23 countries fulfil the EHEA key commitment that external quality assurance be undertaken by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG. The QF-EHEA was adopted in 2005. According to the Bologna Stocktaking Reports, in 2007 only seven countries had adopted the national qualifications framework (NQF). Another six countries had prepared a draft and discussed it with stakeholders.

### **What could and should be done?**

Thus, there is no reason to be pessimistic. However, it should be expected that the European Approach will only turn into reality if national implementation is closely monitored by the BFUG working structure and the topic stays high on the agenda.

Given that many national criteria beyond the ESG and the QF-EHEA are structural, rather than quality-related, it is hard to imagine that an exception for joint programmes would lead to any serious quality deficit. The European Approach encompasses the full core Bologna framework – learning outcomes (LO) linked to the QF-EHEA, credits (ECTS), quality assurance in line with the ESG. Presumably, any “regular” programme from another EHEA country, complying with the European Approach standards, would be recognised at the same level.

After all, it will hardly be realistic to boost joint programmes if there is no readiness to be more flexible and to create a sort of “free zone” for joint programmes, recognising they are genuinely European rather than national programmes. This can, however, not be driven in a top-down process alone, by European actors. There is a need to also stimulate demand for the European Approach by higher education institutions. To this end, it will be crucial that governments commit to improving the conditions and increasing flexibility for joint programmes, and that stakeholders and governments together make efforts to disseminate and provide information about the European Approach, and showcase those good examples that do exist.

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# Implementation of the European Approach: Steps to be taken at European level

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## Introduction

The adoption of the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* (henceforth – European Approach) at the Bologna ministerial conference in Yerevan 2015 represents a remarkable milestone in the development of external quality assurance in the EHEA. With its aims the European Approach addresses problems of higher education institutions in introducing joint programmes which have been well-known for many years<sup>40</sup>:

“The present European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. In particular, it will: – dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes by setting standards for these programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria, and – facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes that genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character” (European Approach, 2015:1).

The significance of the European Approach derives not only from its potential to solve long-standing problems in the implementation of a core feature of the Bologna Process. Moreover, it introduces “a policy measure which is unique in so far as it shall not only be applicable and be applied directly in all EHEA countries without the necessity to adapt it to national regulations, but in essence it also replaces national regulations” (Hopbach, 2017:2).

This paper focuses on the state of implementation of the European Approach and derives from the analysis recommendations for further actions.

## Implementation of the European Approach

In terms of implementing the European Approach, not much progress can be reported in early summer 2017, exactly 2 years after the ministerial conference in Yerevan. The number of joint programmes that have been accredited using this new approach might not even amount to five<sup>41</sup>. At first sight, this

<sup>40</sup> A short analysis is presented in *Background Report on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* (European Approach) (2014).

<sup>41</sup> For two examples see the Bachelor programme “International Teacher Education for Primary Schools” which is jointly delivered by higher education institutions from Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, accredited by NVAO in 2016 (<https://search.nvao.net/search-detail/63562>), and the Master programme “Political Science – Integration and Governance (PoSIG)” which is jointly delivered by higher education institutions in Austria, Slovenia, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Hercegowina, accredited by AQ Austria ([https://www.aq.ac.at/de/akkreditierte-hochschulen-studien/dokumente-entscheidungen-au/PoSiG\\_summary-report\\_20170411.pdf?m=1494233799](https://www.aq.ac.at/de/akkreditierte-hochschulen-studien/dokumente-entscheidungen-au/PoSiG_summary-report_20170411.pdf?m=1494233799))

might be surprising since the application of the European Approach can be deemed a case of win-win: the higher education institutions can implement joint programmes and in particular joint degree programmes much easier, and the quality assurance also has an easier life because they don't have to design particular sets of standards by way of combining existing national regulations in order to comply with all of them. At least the quality assurance agencies quickly understood this and consequently, already in 2016 agencies replied in a survey that they were ready and planning to use the European Approach, while two out of three agencies reported that they would have to amend their own regulations and/or procedures (Hopbach, 2017:15). A closer look shows that it was unrealistic to expect a significant number of cases in 2016. Taking into account the various steps of developing and implementing a joint programme (forming a consortium, developing a curriculum, conducting the accreditation procedure) the expectation of a significant higher number of cases would be unrealistic anyway. However, from current discussions among European stakeholders one gets the impression that the likelihood of quickly growing numbers is not high.

Obviously, methodological problems are not the reason. The analysis of the practice in quality assuring joint programmes shows that all the procedures applied by the quality assurance agencies are based on the ESG and the variations don't create hurdles (Background Report, 2014:3-5). One reason might be that the knowledge about the European Approach hasn't spread widely enough yet. Another reason might be the "European implementation dilemma" of new policies or tools adopted in the frame of the Bologna Process. Based on the Bologna Process as an example of the "*open method of coordination*" (Drachenberg, 2011) the implementation at national level also depends on whether or not the policies and tools fit into the national political priorities (Serrano-Velarde, Hopbach, 2007). Regarding the European Approach this well-known problem is even more significant because of its already mentioned specific feature of replacing national regulations. A closer look shows that the relevance of this should

not be underestimated. The background report states: "What remains the major impediment for both cooperating institutions and agencies are rather the national regulations for approval of the different joint programmes and, thus, the additional national criteria that need to be applied. (...). With regard to the additional national criteria it was concluded that these should be removed when assessing joint programmes in single quality assurance processes" (Background Report, 2014:5).

Asking a national authority to refrain from applying national regulations might be challenging as such. In this case the challenge is even more significant because of the nature of the "additional national criteria". The standards normally applied in any kind of evaluation of study programmes can be derived from the ESG and grouped as follows:

- The learning objectives are clearly defined.
- The concept of the programme supports the achievement of the learning objectives.
- Sufficient qualified staff is available.
- The necessary resources are secured.
- Quality assurance measures are in place.
- The HEI gives transparent and accessible information about the programme.

It is noteworthy that a clear distinction has to be made between the various types of quality assurance of joint programmes as far as the number of degrees conferred and the purpose of the procedures are concerned: first of all, if joint programmes lead to a joint degree it might be much more difficult to comply with contradicting national criteria whereas joint programmes that lead to two or multiple degrees are more flexible in practice. Secondly, if legal consequences are linked to the quality assurance procedure, mostly state approval through accreditation, it's more likely that additional criteria are applied. Regarding accreditation of study programmes with legal consequences by way of state approval, typically these standards for a "good" study programme is transformed into criteria which are both more specific and which cover aspects that are not directly linked to "the"

quality of the programme. Particular the latter causes problems when a national authority has deliberately decided to add certain criteria to those directly or traditionally applied to evaluate the quality. Hence, applying the European Approach means giving away criteria which were deemed relevant in addition to the “regular” ones.

## How to foster the application of the European Approach?

What can European stakeholders do in order to foster the application of the European Approach? Activities in four fields shall be suggested: Promotion, Education, Analysis, and Exchange.

### Promotion

One should not underestimate the relevance of promoting new policies or tools which were agreed upon at ministerial conferences of the EHEA. The fact that applying the European Approach can make it much easier to implement joint programmes and in particular joint degree programmes does not mean that this *good news* spreads automatically. Taking into account that initiatives for setting up a partnership for a joint programme traditionally originate from the bottom up, it’s fair to say that teachers and researchers at higher education institutions are maybe not the ones checking news about the Bologna Process day by day. Hence, it is challenging to bring the news to these most relevant actors as regards joint programmes. From participatory observation, it is pretty clear that although stakeholders at European level can help, this should primarily be done by EUA and EURASHE and not by the quality assurance agencies in order to avoid unintended reactions such as “Just another bureaucratic quality assurance process imposed on the institutions.” It is important to emphasize that applying the European Approach is not an end in itself, and it is not about easing the life of quality assurance agencies. The main message is that joint programmes, and in particular joint degree programmes, can be implemented easier. Maybe even more important than the new approach to quality assurance is the definition of joint programmes ministers agreed

upon: “Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries, and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree” (European Approach, 2015:1). This definition with its emphasis on jointness in all aspects of the design and delivery has the potential to create joint degree programmes as a particular “brand” of the EHEA.

### Education

Promotion helps, but it is not enough. To put it pointedly, one challenge seems to be to make the relevant actors, in particular ministries or responsible authorities but also quality assurance agencies understand the core principle of the European Approach: Direct application without adaptation to national regulations or traditions. Although, it is fair to say that as far as compulsory programme accreditation is concerned there might be one necessary legal step to take which is to allow for the application of the European Approach instead of applying the *regular* procedures. But still it is to be emphasized that application is different from adaptation. Interestingly, after the ministerial conference in Yerevan one could hear comments such as “Sure, application of the European Approach in our system is fine as long as the national criteria are applied as well”. Obviously, this is exactly the opposite of what ministers signed up for in Yerevan. It is fair to say that adapting the results of the ministerial conferences to the national legal frameworks, political priorities, and cultural traditions has been standing practice since 1999. And it is to emphasize that the operational flexibility enshrined in this might be the most important reason for the success of the Bologna Process. However, a particular feature of the European Approach, and its novelty is the deviation from this common way of translating Bologna policies and tools into national practice.

### Analysis

The Bologna ministerial conference in Paris 2018 will provide the first opportunity to take stock of the implementation of

the European Approach at national level. Stakeholders at European level should collect information on where the European Approach is in use, and in particular analyse how its application has been allowed for at national level. Due to different legal frameworks, it will be important to learn which legal steps national authorities take in order to integrate the European Approach into the legally possible procedures of quality assurance and in particular accreditation procedures. One of the most interesting questions will be how this approach is handled in those countries where national administrative law has to be applied in accreditation procedures. A second pillar of such a project should be to analyse the experience of existing cases as regards the applicability of the standards and procedural regulations. Since with this approach quality assurance agencies break new ground, it is important to know whether there might be particular issues which were not taken into account when developing the new approach. Such analysis should be available for further consideration in early 2018 in order to be able to feed the results into the final preparations of the ministerial conference in Paris.

### Exchange

Obviously, the next step would be to provide the relevant actors with an opportunity to exchange their experience gained with the application of the European Approach. Again, it would be important to organize such an exchange before the ministerial conference.

### Conclusion

The European Approach has huge potential for higher education institutions to implement joint programmes and in particular joint degrees because it overcomes the major impediment which is the application of various national criteria in the approval of study programmes which might contradict each other and might not even be directly related to aspects of the quality of the programme. The biggest challenge of implementing the European Approach results

from its unique nature as a tool that can be – and that has to be in order to use its potential – applied without further adaptations to national settings. This principle has to be discussed with the national authorities in order to make the European Approach a reality and a hallmark of fostering the European dimension of teaching and learning, and thus develop the European Higher Education Area further. European stakeholders should take the lead in promoting the application of the European Approach by analysing possible hurdles and by advising on how to overcome these hurdles.

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# European Consortium for Accreditation: Challenges / Perspective / Initiatives

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Joint Programmes are one of the main success stories of the European Higher Education Area. Yet, their quality assurance can be described as one of its more intricate challenges. While the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) have set an overarching framework of criteria to assure the quality of a single or joint study programme, national, and in some cases like Germany even federal, circumstances remain serious obstacles to implementing a multi-national study programme.

One of the central objectives in founding the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) in 2003 was – and still is – to support and ease the mutual recognition of quality assurance decisions for all types of higher education programmes. Different initiatives and projects by ECA have encouraged and promoted the development of the common European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach) as approved by the Bologna ministers in 2015. Yet, obstacles for quality assurance of joint programmes still remain. They have to be tackled by common efforts of higher education institutions, external quality assurance actors, politics and society. The case of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management has provided a prime example to understand better this overall process, its pitfalls, but also possible future solutions for a straightforward quality assurance of joint programmes in general.

These aspects will be addressed from ECA's perspective addressing current challenges and presenting ECA's approach, initiatives

and future projects in order to support a manageable implementation of the European Approach in the course of the Bologna process.

## Challenges

Starting on a pessimistic note, one could assemble a quite long list of challenges to full implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach). Hence, it might be helpful to sort these challenges in order to better address the different actors and stakeholders who are able to tackle and resolve these challenges.

### Political

The implementation of the European Approach is under way in a majority of the Bologna countries. However, the specific



Figure 1. **Challenges in Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**

status of the approach remains unclear – and might often be hampered or delayed by reservations of different political stakeholders. It is often assumed that this approach too easily bypasses established norms and regulations in the national (or regional) quality assurance systems. In the case of Germany, for example, the European Approach can only be applied to programmes awarding joint degrees, but not for those with double or multiple degrees, even if the latter comprise a much higher share of joint programmes with German higher education institutions involved.

Another challenge to be politically tackled is the inclusion of higher education institutions from outside the European Higher Education Area that are or plan to become consortium partners in a joint programme.

### Procedural

While the European Approach defines a set of plausible procedural steps firmly based on the ESG, implementing a common procedure might prove difficult due to a number of methodological or just purely organizational challenges. These might be, among other things, the selection of the agency, acquisition of knowledgeable experts, choice of site for the visit of the experts panel, financial aspects, language of self-report and documents and any other procedural decisions and (national) rules. However, as HEIs and agencies have by now considerable expertise in national or international accreditation/evaluation, these points might be more of a nuisance than insurmountable obstacles.

### Criterial

A lot has already been said about the temptation of national regulatory bodies to add specific national criteria or requirements to the European Approach. It can surely work even with some additional stipulations, arising, for instance, out of national or federal higher education legislation. However, every add-on will reduce its value. In the end, there might only be a few small-scale joint programmes left where the European Approach is of any real added value.

Yet, as first experiences have shown, when the European Approach is adopted by the appropriate national bodies, it rather sticks to the core criteria. Thus, the ESG-based standards could rather be applied easily by agencies, higher education institutions and experts.

### Informational

Taking these different types of challenges into account, their common feature is a lack of precise information about them. All stakeholders involved in initiating, conceptualizing, organizing, running and accrediting a joint programme are particularly reliant on information about the state of implementation of the European Approach, about specific national regulations and about procedural chores. Providing detailed and trustworthy information about current standards, identifying the relevant authorities and sharing best practices could be fundamentally important to ease and support the quality assurance of joint programmes.

## ECA Perspective & Initiatives

From its founding in 2003 and its incorporation in 2014 onwards, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) has organized and understood itself as a bottom-up network of agencies with a strong focus on projects and services. Detecting new needs and developments in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the working groups of ECA have developed several projects addressing different stakeholders besides the ECA-agencies (currently 18) themselves: higher education institutions, ENIC-NARICS, students in general but also their representative bodies, employers and political stakeholders.

### ECA Initiatives

From the outset, the mission of ECA has been decidedly *less politically* motivated than with other European associations (e.g. ENQA), rather focusing on the everyday experiences and relationships of its member agencies. Tackling political challenges directly has therefore not been ECA's approach in previous years – but it is now gradually

changing, especially due to intensified co-operation with non-Bologna accreditation networks.

ECA was started to meet much more proactively *procedural* and *criteria* challenges in transnational accreditation, with a special focus on joint programmes. The TEAM II project (2008–2010), for instance, aimed at developing a common methodology for quality assurance of joint programmes. Some of the project outcomes have been publications clarifying basic terms and problems in this area<sup>42</sup>. In TEAM II, ECA also developed the initial idea of a single accreditation procedure for joint programmes, based on a core common methodology and tested with five pilot procedures<sup>43</sup>.

The JOQAR project (2010 – 2013) further explored how to ease the accreditation and recognition of joint programmes. With 14 project partners, including four recognition bodies, a comparison of the accreditation of four Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes gave new insights into single accreditation procedures. It led to a refinement of the methodology for single review procedures and the dissemination of good practices for recognizing joint programme degrees<sup>44</sup>. It is worth highlighting that the proposed and applied assessment framework included common criteria as well as variable national components. The latter had to be adapted to the countries participating in the pilot joint programmes, which hampered the implementation process quite significantly<sup>45</sup>.

ECA has also turned its attention to *informational challenges*. The TEAM II project already initiated the implementation of a common

database of accredited study programmes in the EHEA, named Crossroads. Thanks to JOQAR, Erasmus Mundus programmes are now also included in the database<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, study results have shown that a common platform supporting the organization and accreditation of joint programmes would be highly appreciated. Accordingly, the European Coordination Point was initially established for the duration of JOQAR. It proved to be very helpful for the programmes themselves as well as for the participating agencies. Finally, it could be linked to another project initiated by ECA: E-Train (2010–2012) established a training scheme for experts in international single accreditation procedures and a database for facilitating an easy, cross-border exchange of these experts between agencies<sup>47</sup>.

FRONTEX's "Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management" has then provided one of the first cases in which the Single Accreditation Procedure as developed by the JOQAR project was applied. In 2014/15, NVAO coordinated a review procedure, encompassing six partner institutions and six different accrediting or recognizing institutions and agencies.

In sum, these projects initiated by ECA had a gradual, but steady influence on the preparation of the European Approach for the Yerevan ministers' conference in 2015, especially by providing a tested and applicable methodology for single accreditation procedures<sup>48</sup>. A crucial success was to prevent the European Approach from taking additional national criteria into account – such a "backdoor" already implemented into the core common standards would have rendered it much less useful.

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42 [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Joint\\_programmes:\\_Too\\_many\\_cooks\\_in\\_the\\_kitchen](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Joint_programmes:_Too_many_cooks_in_the_kitchen)

43 [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/How\\_to\\_assess\\_and\\_accredit\\_joint\\_programmes\\_in\\_Europe\\_\(2010\)](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/How_to_assess_and_accredit_joint_programmes_in_Europe_(2010))

44 [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework\\_for\\_Fair\\_Recognition\\_of\\_Joint\\_Degrees](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Fair_Recognition_of_Joint_Degrees); [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment\\_Framework\\_for\\_Joint\\_Programmes\\_in\\_Single\\_Accreditation\\_Procedures](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment_Framework_for_Joint_Programmes_in_Single_Accreditation_Procedures)

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48 [http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/European%20Approach%20QA%20of%20Joint%20Programmes\\_Background%20Report.pdf](http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/European%20Approach%20QA%20of%20Joint%20Programmes_Background%20Report.pdf)

## Way Forward

The adoption of the European Approach has indeed been a significant step to ease the quality assurance of joint programmes. ECA is proud to have facilitated its establishment, but shares some of the concerns of different stakeholders that political, criterial and procedural challenges still exist and may limit these achievements in the future.

In accordance with its general mission and aims, ECA sees a responsibility to further promote and support the wide implementation of the European Approach. Assisting different stakeholders in developing, implementing and accrediting joint programmes is and will be an important commitment of the association. However, as has been discussed above, the *political* sphere has not been seen as a primary playing field and addressing political stakeholders is not the primary approach of ECA with its bottom-up and project-oriented structure. In addition, the *criterial* challenges may not be the most pressing ones, as long as Bologna countries and institutions refrain from adding additional national regulations and standards to the European Approach.

ECA can and should focus on *procedural* and *informational* challenges by providing operational and informational support to agencies, higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders. One main pillar could be the ImpEA project (“Facilitating Implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes”), which has evolved from the JOQAR project and has now been selected in the Erasmus plus scheme in summer 2017.

Its main objectives are:

- ♦ Identifying key obstacles in the implementation of the European Approach in

the European Higher Education Area in general and in project partner countries in particular.

- ♦ Supporting partner quality assurance agencies in running European Approach-based program accreditation procedures (ex ante and ex post).
- ♦ Supporting partner HEI in pursuing the external accreditation based on the European Approach.
- ♦ Developing a European Approach implementation toolkit with a set of recommendations and proposed solutions for the policymakers and QA agencies.

The main outcomes of this project will be:

- ♦ A background report on the status and current challenges of implementation of the European Approach.
- ♦ The development of a training methodology for partner quality assurance agencies as well as representatives of higher education institutions.
- ♦ Experiences based on four pilot procedures, feeding into an analytical report.
- ♦ Setting up an online toolkit which provides a sustainable service offer, including manuals, provision of guidelines regarding best practices, FAQs, report templates and more.

In the short term, the experiences and services of ImpEA will be especially useful for quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions awaiting accreditation of their joint programmes. In the longer run, it will (hopefully) encourage the development of new joint programmes with partners in – and outside the EHEA. In addition, it will (hopefully) raise the awareness of political actors that joint programmes are one of the success stories of the internationalization in higher education – and that their quality assurance has to be made as easy as possible without sacrificing the quality itself.

# Developments in recognition of joint programmes

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May 30, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

One of the most tightly knit relationships in European higher education is the relationship between quality assurance and recognition. Competent recognition authorities rely heavily on the decisions of quality assurance agencies regarding programme and institutional quality assurance. In short, if a programme or institution is not accredited, there is no recognition of the programmes.

The legal setting of recognition within the European Higher Education Area is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and of course national legislation on recognition and of the establishment of joint programmes. A basic principle of the LRC is that a competent recognition authority should recognise fully a foreign programme as being comparable to a similar programme within its own educational system, unless the recognition authority can prove that there are substantial differences between the foreign and the similar national programme. Substantial differences should be related to assessment of the level, quality, workload, learning outcomes and profile of the foreign programme.

In terms of recognition there should be no differences in the procedures and principles of recognition of a joint programme or a programme offered by a single higher education institution from one country. However, when it comes to assessing substantial differences in relation to the quality of joint programmes, there have traditionally been more complicated procedures. The subsidiary text to the LRC on the recommendation on the recognition of joint programmes

from 2004 outlined that “competent recognition authorities may make the recognition of joint degrees conditional on all parts of the study programme leading to the degree and/or institutions providing the programme being subject to quality assurance”. This actually means that if a consortium of five institutions offers a joint programme, recognition authorities may make the recognition of the programme contingent on the programme being quality assured in all five participating countries. Obviously, this gives nourishment to the constant accreditation circle which joint programmes have been subject to for many years.

The adoption by the ministerial conference in Yerevan of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in 2015 has triggered a revision of the subsidiary text to the LRC on “The recommendation on the recognition of joint programmes”. Now the text states explicitly that “recognition authorities should recognise joint degrees, which are quality assured in a single cross-border process by one quality assurance agency (which applies the ESG’s), provided that the outcomes of the quality assurance are officially recognised in the countries to which the providing institutions belong”.

This shows of course a token of trust between the countries of the European Higher Education Area and an important step towards much smoother recognition procedures and recognition decisions. This seems as a logical consequence of the Bologna Process and one could rhetorically ask whether we can claim a European Higher Education

Area if we do not trust the qualifications and the agreed standards of quality assurance within the EHEA which have been confirmed in several ministerial communiqués.

Now, is the recognition of joint programmes pure idyll and smooth sailing? The monitoring of the implementation of the Bologna Process carried out before the ministerial conferences and the monitoring of the implementation of the LRC carried out by the LRC Bureau in 2015 have exposed the rather uneven implementation of the Bologna Process and of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. There are still countries which have not provided a legal basis for establishing and offering programmes, or which in their legislation outlines national provisions such as that a certain number of credits must be studied in the home country or specific demands of the amount of credits of a thesis and more, making the accreditation and thus the recognition of joint programmes problematic.

Furthermore, there may still appear problems of recognition of joint programmes even though all principles and procedures of the LRC and Bologna Process have been implemented. To use a couple of examples, a consortium offering a legally established joint programme with three fully accredited institutions and one legitimate but non-accredited provider like a professional organisation cannot be guaranteed full recognition, since the basis of recognition is always that all programmes must be accredited or be offered by an accredited institution, before full recognition can be granted.

Another example could be a Master level programme offered jointly by an HEI offering research based Master programmes and a professionally oriented HEI offering professionally oriented Master programmes not giving access to PhD programmes. Here we have problems in relation to access to PhD programmes, since it may be difficult to recognise the programme and maybe give the holders of the degree better formal rights than the professional Master degree would give them in their home country.

In both examples substantial differences could be rightfully claimed, as well as reasons for not giving full recognition. Good recognition practice would be to at least grant partial recognition for credits studied in accredited institutions in the former example and as a minimum accept the credits studied in the research based HEI and consider credits studied in the professionally oriented HEI in the latter example. For these reasons, it is also vital for HEIs issuing Diploma Supplements for joint programmes to carefully describe in which institution the student has taken the various credits and parts of the programme.

However, not to finish on a problematic note, the adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has paved the way for better and smoother recognition of joint degrees and we should expect that the implementation of the process of the quality assurance of joint programmes and the recognition of joint degrees will be carefully monitored in the years to come.

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# **4**

## **GROUP DISCUSSIONS SESSIONS**

## Overview of the first day's discussion

**Aurelija Valeikienė,**

*Deputy Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)*

*31 May 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania*

The aim of this overview is to stir up thinking and to continue exploration in order to establish to what extent single accreditation of joint programmes as a proposed solution could work to resolve the challenges we currently face.

It remains to be seen to what extent single accreditation of joint programmes is the solution for the higher education institutions (HEIs) undergoing external quality assurance procedures at the national level to meet their accreditation obligations and addressing the [possible] substantial differences preventing them from obtaining full recognition abroad. We know some of the problems associated with multiple procedures that higher education institutions still face; it is also true that until now we have had very few cases of single accreditation implemented successively. The impact of the European Approach is still uncertain.

What are the challenges associated with quality assurance, and in particular external quality assurance? We have seen that there is a difficulty in accepting decisions of other quality assurance agencies. This was demonstrated at country and procedure level (being programme or institutional procedures) and how they are recognised throughout Member States. We have noticed some unease about abandoning additional national criteria, and a movement away from ideas on how to evaluate these programs in terms of the methodologies applied. Implementing one procedure might just be another type of cooperation among the agencies. Yet some other challenges may exist, as demonstrated by the quality agencies. Sometimes we have difficulty simply reaching out to each other

and then agreeing on ways to collaborate despite all the avenues established for cooperation and the many forms of dialogue.

Yesterday some solutions and quick fixes (or maybe not so quick) were proposed. One bold idea was to entirely abandon programme evaluations and accreditations, and to have institutional reviews only. Perhaps in this way we could get rid of some of the headaches associated with programme evaluations. Maybe, on a very small scale – modestly said – we could choose to go with agreeing – or actually not agreeing, as it is already agreed – but implementing on the national levels the principle that we all observe the six-year accreditation term. Such agreement alone would alleviate much of the pain of higher education institutions.

A more radical idea is to actually elevate joint degree programmes from the national arena in order to completely remove them from the national regulatory area and have a truly European approach not only regarding evaluation, but implementation, and to shape them according to the basics of the Bologna Process. This would mean having such features as:

- workload counted in the ECTS;
- Diploma Supplements issued automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language;
- learning outcomes formulated according to the general guidelines of the qualification framework for the European Higher Education Area;
- allowing the range of credits per cycle as agreed in the Dublin Descriptors (180–240 for the first cycle, and 60 – 120 for the second cycle).



Yet, I would like to question and provoke you a bit more. Let's put ourselves in research mode and think like researchers. In scientific enquiry, in order to find a solution, one should be very careful when formulating the issue we are dealing with, i.e. what the "real" problem in front of us is. I would like to attempt to formulate these problems.

Maybe we are having slow progress with the European Approach because of technical reasons? Yesterday we discussed how significant joint programmes are for students, for higher education institutions, for the entire European Higher Education Area, how this promotes our jointness. Still, there are too few joint programmes, so despite all the rhetoric, possibly this is just a minor technical aspect that our busy governments and other agencies have not had time to address. Maybe this is related to the high level of specificity of the issue? We know that quality assurance is technical knowledge, it requires some specific preparation on the part of agencies, it also needs special training and preparation on the part of experts, being able to evaluate those programmes and implement the procedure as expected in the European Approach.

Yesterday we also discussed some financial matters, so maybe this is the crux of the matter. Economics could hinder us, as there are real funding challenges for higher education institutions that must incur the evaluation costs. Similarly, there is another issue for quality assurance agencies - if several countries and agencies are involved, who gets the bill? And what about translation? We saw that one programme's self-evaluation may involve several kilos of paperwork. How do we go about translating these documents? What about translation of interviews during a site visit? How do we enter the data into various national databases (in the national and other languages), which is required for reporting on study programmes (this is the case for at least some of the European countries)?

Maybe the economic reasoning goes even further to merge with the political reasoning? When quality assurance results are linked with the ability to receive public

funding (conditional on positive findings), the public authorities might be very uneasy to accept decisions made by someone else outside their jurisdictions, since in this case someone else is issuing rulings on where the common [national] money [should] go. The true reason for the state not being willing to recognise decisions is its fear of losing decisive power over spending of a portion of national public funds. Passing these decisions on funding and spending of public finances to some other constituencies (other than national) may weaken and limit the national authorities, and even jeopardise their accountability to local tax payers.

Possibly the problem is educational. Yesterday we discussed that we are not very sure whether the ministers agreeing on the European Approach had a very clear understanding what this entails. Simply, when the commitment for single accreditation of joint degrees was made, the implications for the national authorities were not clear; the approach was endorsed, but no subsequent actions were taken to steer the policy in practice. Again, this might be related to the technical nature of quality assurance and to the fact that politicians lack time to get acquainted with the subject. Could we address this absence of knowledge and understanding and then be happy that we have resolved the issue? Yesterday we also discussed the fact that there are many stakeholders interested in the joint programmes (primarily HEIs and students), there are various associations and promoters of the idea, such as EUA, EURASHE, quality assurance agencies and their association ENQA, ESU, EQAR, EAIE to name a few. Maybe the challenge is that we still have some educational task to carry out, and if we do so with joint and concerted effort, we will solve the puzzle.

Or could this be a truly political question? Political in that for political decisions to be taken, proper timing is needed. We know that many national reforms are taking place in various European Higher Education Area countries. So, possibly this is just a bad moment for another proposal to change the legislation; parliaments might not be willing to debate the issue, and the governments and ministers are not ready because there

are more pertinent issues on the table. As we know from research on the achievement of educational reforms, their success might be influenced negatively by major undertakings in other spheres of life occurring simultaneously. In this respect, timing is crucial, and it might be that the best moment is not now, but later.

There is yet another subtle issue: very many accreditations of joint programmes take place in English, so it is related to the usage of other languages than the given language in the particular state in Europe. Maybe the national authorities are uneasy about the wider usage and influence of English? This is a very delicate question, but maybe we should keep it in mind.

What if this is a very real power play? And here I am being the most provocative. What does it mean to have a European Approach to quality assurance? We might be faced with a situation where we have to give up some local powers. For the politicians – the governments and the ministers – who take the decisions, this is a potential threat to their influence. Decisions over priorities, criteria, instruments might be taken elsewhere in Europe with no counter-balancing on the domestic level. Unfortunately, we do see situations when quality assurance becomes a [national] political instrument, rather than a tool for helping higher education institutions to promote quality culture, enhanced quality provision and increase the transparency of offers. It is a valid question.

And the last thing, if we go deep down to the core reasons for single accreditation towards quality assurance of joint degrees: isn't this about trust – or lack of it? Yesterday we acknowledged that we have very diverse higher education institutions, some more capable of taking care of their own quality, while others are less experienced and, for a variety of reasons, devote fewer resources. Likewise, we have different stages of maturity of external quality assurance within higher education systems. So, the essence

may lie in higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies, namely, the lack of trust in how they can and will handle single accreditation. The origin of the problem could be in the mismatch between what we say about joint programmes and what we see in them. Joint programmes are not abundant; to be implemented they require a lot of administrative attention and effort on the part of academics. We would like to think that joint programmes equal excellence. However, in reality we see that there are multiple challenges related to their implementation, and that their quality is not always the highest. There is a mismatch between our intentions and reality.

Students yesterday talked about commercialisation and marketisation of higher education. This is very uncomfortable to acknowledge, but we do have an issue here: some institutions are genuinely concerned about quality, while others are just doing business in higher education.

Perhaps we also lack trust in quality assurance agencies. We see that there are questions around professional integrity, and the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area are meant to give greater attention to it. Quality assurance needs to be more clearly separated from consultancy services. Especially tricky is upholding the same high standards when agencies, registered on EQAR, run procedures outside their home jurisdictions. There are examples showing that this is not always the case. Unfortunately, there are grey areas undermining trust. Last but not least, are we not afraid of losing the local contextual knowledge of a given existing higher education system and other specificity if we trust procedures to a foreign, EQAR-registered agency? We know that quality is multidimensional and context dependent.

These are some provocative questions to consider; let's have a discussion.

# Summary of the 1<sup>st</sup> round discussion regarding the challenges, problems and obstacles for single accreditation of joint programmes in European Higher Education Area

May 31, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

The first round of group discussion sessions was devoted to the current challenges, problems, and obstacles for single accreditation of joint programmes and to the risks for single initial accreditation and following re-accreditation of joint programmes expected to be encountered in the future in the European Higher Education Area from the point of view of different stakeholders of the European Higher Education Area: quality assurance agencies; higher education institutions; international associations; ministries; etc.

The following challenges, problems, and obstacles for single accreditation of joint programmes were formulated by the participants of the conference group discussion sessions:

## Problems we are facing now:

- Different national legislation (including different national criteria) and different bureaucracies of accreditation procedures within EHEA countries.
- Lack of knowledge on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015).
- Lack of trust in higher education systems and distrust in foreign quality assurance agencies cause issues on an international level.
- Lack of flexibility and leadership of the quality assurance agencies to be open and to gain new experience in quality assurance of joint programmes.
- Lack of experts regarding joint programmes and the inferior quality of the joint programmes reviewers and the mindset of the reviewers.

- The definitions of “joint degree”, “double degree”, “just partners”, etc. are used in different countries in different ways and create misunderstandings on an international level.
- High costs in terms of time and fees for preparation, evaluation and accreditation of joint programmes.
- Vicious cycle – joint programmes are not a priority for the national authorities and higher education institutions and this creates a lack of incentives for policy makers and a lack of critical mass regarding joint programmes.

## Future problems:

- Political trends – the governments within the EU are not always pro-European;
- Pressure on quality assurance agencies – when the government changes, the outlook on the management of higher education can also change, which in turn might impact the quality assurance agency;
- Overall quality management – the endless challenge of how to improve quality management; inconsistencies between the higher education institutions might be preserved;
- Check on trust in advance (higher sensitivity to issues) – there is a need for proper quality management, as problems with managing joint programmes might appear;
- Future problems – non-European partners – what kind of issues will this cause?

## Summary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> round discussion on actions needed to implement one single accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management

May 31, 2017, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

The second round of the group discussion sessions was based on the findings from the first round of the group discussions and devoted to discussing the actions needed to implement single re-accreditation of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management (as one pioneering example) and the steps that the key stakeholders in the Bologna Process need to implement until the next Ministerial Conference in Paris in May, 2018 from the point of view of different stakeholders of the European Higher Education Area: quality assurance agencies; higher education institutions; international associations; ministries; etc.

The following proposals regarding to whom and how the challenges, obstacles and risks of implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes can be addressed, were formulated by the participants of the conference group discussion sessions:

### Proposals to *national authorities*:

- Streamline legislation and remove obstacles to act for EQAR-registered agencies.
- Create a framework for joint programmes as an exception in national legislation.
- Provide financial support for joint programmes and their quality assurance.
- Introduce feedback procedures to report to ministries on the experience with joint programmes at the quality assurance agency and higher education institution level.

- Make joint programmes part of the national internalisation strategy in higher education.

### Proposals to *quality assurance agencies*:

- Train experts on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes.
- Start using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes – practical experience is still lacking.
- Create a handbook for using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area.
- Collaborate with each other.

### Proposals to European *organisations/networks*:

- Lobby national authorities to amend the legislation, do benchmarking, present it in the Bologna stocktaking report.
- Analyse existing cases, share good practice, develop guidelines for programme designers and accreditors of good practice on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area.
- Use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes as part of the European brand/quality label, and not as a burden.
- Initiate projects on joint programmes, such as training of experts, higher education institutions, etc.

**Proposals to European Commission:**

- ♦ The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes should become a criterion for EU funded development and implementation of joint programmes (e.g. funds available in Erasmus +).
- ♦ Provide financial support for projects initiated on joint programmes and fund single accreditation procedures of joint programmes.
- ♦ Establish a European awarding entity for joint programmes to stimulate joint programmes as a European treasure, and to show best practices.

**Proposals to higher education institutions:**

- ♦ Make the national authorities aware of the need to change legislative frameworks (lobby).
- ♦ Create demand for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes.





# 5 CONCLUSIONS

# Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes: Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality – Concluding Remarks

Aurelija Valeikienė, Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė, Achim Hopbach

The Vilnius conference brought together more than one hundred stakeholders from 18 countries of the European Higher Education Area to discuss the implementation of the common European policy regarding the single accreditation of joint programmes. Specific institutional experiences and legislation of particular countries based on the case of the consortium of the *European Joint Masters' Programme in Strategic Border Management*, implemented by six European higher education institutions in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Spain, and coordinated by Frontex, the European Union Border and Coast Guard Agency, were examined. The Vilnius conference clearly demonstrated the high degree of complexity of single accreditation of joint programmes and highlighted the many issues still to be tackled. Two years after the adoption of the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* (2015), its application seems to be very slow and far below expectations. It was said that, to overcome hurdles, it is necessary to coordinate attempts in the domain of accreditation of joint programmes by thinking outside the “national boxes” and to bring this work together with the demands, needs and experiences of international consortiums of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies across the European Higher Education Area.

The conference had two missions: to identify obstacles still existing for single accreditation of joint programmes, and to propose possible solutions. The objectives of the event were reached by presenting and

discussing various viewpoints and experiences, and suggesting ways forward in the existing and accepted diversity of European higher education systems to reinforce implementation of the European Approach on the ground. Conference participants identified issues for organizations and institutions responsible for the quality assurance in higher education to address both nationally and internationally. These issues are presented below.

## Work already done

In building and sustaining the European Higher Education Area, joint programmes are considered to be a hallmark of togetherness, and are thus received as such. They continue to attract considerable political attention and investment, and were accepted by higher education institutions as a large educational, scientific, cultural, and social project, supported by other stakeholder organizations. Yet despite this, there are many challenges with transforming the idea into academic reality and delivering the added value of cooperation.

As recorded in the Bucharest Communiqué, the encouragement for higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees was backed by the resolve of the Ministers of Education to remove obstacles to cooperation and mobility that stem from the national contexts. This led to the Bologna Follow-Up Group commissioning an ad-hoc expert group to develop policy for a specific European accreditation approach for joint programmes. The ad-hoc



working group came to the same conclusions as the ENQA members<sup>49</sup>, namely that the problems hindering both joint programmes and joint degrees lie mainly in national regulations for approval of programmes to be applied in quality assurance and recognition.

More specifically, the working group observed that:

- ♦ *Several national quality assurance processes* are costly, time consuming, occur at different times at institutions, parts of programmes are subject to different criteria and procedures, different panels visit different institutions and as a result programmes in their entirety are not evaluated, and programmes retain multiple accreditations;
- ♦ *A joint quality assurance process* can experience time and cost savings, but the quality assurance agencies still need to coordinate and compare evaluation frameworks, an international panel may or may not produce one review report, and there is no guarantee that the results will be accepted in higher education systems of institutions involved in the various mandatory procedures they are subject to;
- ♦ *The Single quality assurance procedure* represents a step forward with one process coordinated by one agency, the commissioning of one expert panel visiting just one location and producing one report; and the evaluation framework consisting of two parts: the European shared component (the “core”) and the relevant national components (the “plus”). The backbone of the European element

is reliance on ESG<sup>50</sup>, QF-EHEA<sup>51</sup> and ECTS<sup>52</sup>. The national component would consist of additional nationally applied criteria in order to meet nation state requirements for accreditation.

The ECA consortium, in its own right, has identified the challenges for joint programmes as being political ones, related to information, of a procedural nature, or grounded in criteria. Based on the lessons learnt, especially of the JOQAR project that is considered as the most profound on quality assurance of joint programmes, the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* was proposed by the ad-hoc group formed by the Bologna-Follow-up Group. The draft was discussed with stakeholders and subsequently adopted by the Ministers of Education at the Yerevan meeting in 2015.

In the meantime, to advance fair recognition of joint degrees, new tools were developed, such as the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual<sup>53</sup> (endorsed by Ministers of Education with the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012), its spin-off being the European Recognition Manual for HEIs<sup>54</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> edition produced in 2016), and the Revised Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees and the Explanatory Memorandum<sup>55</sup> (approved by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in February 2016). To help further develop practices of members of ENIC<sup>56</sup> and NARIC<sup>57</sup> networks and to bring recognition into line with the best international approaches, SQUARE<sup>58</sup> standards and guidelines<sup>59</sup> were created and have already been voluntarily tested by a third of members.

49 ENQA (2012), Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (ENQA workshop report 19)

50 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

51 Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

52 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

53 <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/>

54 <http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf>

55 [http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Revised\\_Recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_Recognition\\_of\\_Joint\\_Degrees\\_2016.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Revised_Recommendation_on_the_Recognition_of_Joint_Degrees_2016.pdf)

56 European Network of Information Centres in the European Region, the latter being defined by joining the Council of Europe Cultural Convention

57 National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

58 System of Quality Assurance for the Recognition Networks

59 <http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/SQUARE%20Protocol%20FIN.pdf>

The *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* fills the gap with new quality assurance instruments. Its essential characteristics are:

- ♦ Joint programmes should be based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, namely ESC and QF-EHEA, as well as ECTS,
- ♦ Quality assurance should be implemented in an integrated manner, both in relation to internal quality assurance within HEIs, consortium members, and in relation to their external quality assurance procedures.

More specifically, two methods of application were proposed:

- ♦ In the event cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level, they should select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies and in case follow the notification procedures as required for regulated professions falling under the EU directive 2005/36/EC and its successor 2013/55/EU;
- ♦ In the event all cooperating higher education institutions are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level only and have “self-accrediting” status, they may use the European Approach in setting up joint internal approval and monitoring processes for their joint programmes.

## Current status

As noted by EUA, in several systems where HEIs have self-accrediting powers or external QA is carried out at institutional level, programme accreditation regulations do not pose a challenge. Yet the reality on the ground is that, to cite EQAR, while only seven EHEA states implement institutional level procedures and another seven states run both approaches (both programme and institutional level reviews), the vast majority of countries – 34 to be precise – still exercise programme-level evaluations. Thus,

regulatory obstacles persist – and are likely to remain.

Among the countries where all or some HEIs are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level, the European Approach is available to institutions by virtue of them being autonomous. This is the case of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK. So, in theory, if HEIs from these countries embark on the creation of the joint programme, they might not be facing any challenges of external quality assurance. It would be interesting to find out if among the approximately 2 500 joint programmes currently running there is any external quality assurance. Unfortunately, currently no such universal register<sup>60</sup> exists that would enable us to search for this information. We are talking here about challenges to fulfil external quality assurance obligations that higher education institutions in 40 countries of EHEA might face, and this means a challenge of a massive scale.

As demonstrated in the case of the *European Joint Masters' programme in Strategic Border Management*, sometimes HEIs are having difficulties just to learn for how long their external review results are valid within some jurisdictions, not to mention other essential questions, such as:

- ♦ programme entry requirements,
- ♦ programme volume in ECTS and number of learning hours per ECTS,
- ♦ structure of the qualification and the profile,
- ♦ provisions for recognition/validation of prior learning,
- ♦ pass mark and the common grading system,
- ♦ title to be awarded,
- ♦ specifications on the parchment and Diploma Supplement.

Lastly, higher education institutions and external quality assurance agencies face

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<sup>60</sup> Some information on Erasmus Mundus joint programmes is available via ECA consortium, but there is not an exhaustive list of all joint programmes in EHEA. See [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Erasmus\\_Mundus\\_Master\\_programmes](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Erasmus_Mundus_Master_programmes)

financial challenges both in the implementation of the programme and its quality assurance; therefore, both national and European Union support is regarded as vital. Quality and cooperation do have costs attached.

Another aspect to add and be noted by conference participants is that at the moment there still are countries where other ENQA-reviewed and EQAR-registered agencies are not allowed to operate at all, or where certain additional conditions should be met. There was speculation that this may be happening due to such underlying reasons as lack of mutual trust or control over public funds' spending (where programme evaluation results are linked with funding allocations).

As acknowledged by external quality assurance agencies that tried to apply the European Approach and subsequently often had to settle on only the single quality assurance procedure, flexibility is needed – otherwise we are all stuck in local regulations and old cultural habits.

Testimonies received from recognition centres as well as members of ENIC and NARIC networks also support the view that flexibility is desired and indeed possible following the principle that equivalence is not sought, but full recognition should be granted unless substantial differences are demonstrated. The concept of substantial difference is meant to accommodate minor differences between the countries and qualifications awarded.

## Proposed solutions

As was demonstrated during the conference, **there is still a need to imbed into national legislation an agreed European definition of a joint programme and a joint degree.** In 2015, it was estimated that 11 countries had not developed explicit notions of joint programmes and joint degrees<sup>61</sup>. This is to be

done with the aim to clearly identify cases where the European Approach is or will be applicable as to not interfere with other programmes offered. While there is promotional work to be done by international organizations, these efforts should be supplemented with proposals from QA agencies, which as a rule are well versed in reading and interpreting legislation and therefore could take up an intermediary role in the dialogue with local decision makers.

Further, **awarding of joint degrees should be clearly allowed by national legislation.** Currently only a subset of joint programmes result in the award of joint qualifications, more often HEIs combined with issuing double or multiple degrees. **These awards should come with a Diploma Supplement in an agreed format, following the Council of Europe/UNESCO/European Commission template.**

Participants of the conference agreed that **there is still a need to promote the European Approach in political and academic circles**, as well as a need to promote the Ministerial commitment made on behalf of Bologna Process states two years ago, so that it is widely accepted by both the local authorities and HEIs. Higher education institutions themselves and their associations – EUA, EURASHE and EAIE – are seen as the primary agents for this task of increasing awareness, followed by the quality assurance agencies and their ENQA and ECA associations, and the EQAR register, as secondary.

It is worth reminding the relevant decision makers that **the issue is not about translating the European Approach into the national legislation, but abandoning the latter in favour of the European Approach – as this was the commitment of the Ministers in Yerevan.** Security and trust in the European Approach is backed by the requirement that only such procedures

<sup>61</sup> European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015. The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Page 218. Full text at [https://media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/73/3/2015\\_Implementation\\_report\\_20.05.2015\\_613733.pdf](https://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/73/3/2015_Implementation_report_20.05.2015_613733.pdf)

are unconditionally accepted that are implemented by external quality assurance agencies, which themselves are subject to ENQA reviews and registration in EQAR. On the part of the quality assurance agencies, some work might be needed to learn how to directly apply the European Approach, instead of applying their regular procedures, and correspondingly train their own staff and brief experts.

**Ministers should be further encouraged to fulfil the obligation they took upon themselves in Bucharest to allow EQAR-listed agencies to operate in their jurisdictions.** Without this promise being translated into national legislation, due to the voluntary nature of Bologna Process, not all HEIs will be able to freely choose the agency through which they would satisfy external accountability requirements.

While the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, as its title says, is focused on quality assurance, to some extent it also defines the standards for the quality of the programme – these are described in Part B of the document. Thus, the Approach is able to tackle part of the problems that joint programmes face, but only partially. Under the Approach “the institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education systems of the countries in which they are based”. The latter requirement sends the HEIs back to the confusing scenario of trying to please all nationally embedded regulatory authorities – a task that has been proven as unrealistic to fully accomplish. Therefore, there is a need to fill the gap – **continue discussions and come up with more precise definitions for the quality of the joint programmes.** As demonstrated by the example of the *European Joint Master's Programme in Strategic Border Management*, national regulations regarding both quality assurance and the quality of the joint programme are different and hard to reconcile; the consortium had to lobby for some locally embedded restrictions to be lifted, or lost some partners on the way. Luckily, some European projects concerned with the experiences of external quality assurance agencies and HEIs, including ImpEA coordinated

by the ECA consortium, are already in the pipeline and are expected to provide further input on the subject.

There is still work to be done **to establish joint programmes as a brand of particular European importance.** This task has several dimensions, including universal registration and visibility via some designated gateway, but more importantly, assuring that joint programmes are really associated with excellent teaching and learning. Unfortunately, evaluation results to date do not support the view that all joint programmes are of exceptional quality. This is the challenge to be taken up by HEIs themselves, which are primarily responsible for quality of their provision. ENQA and ECA as associations of quality assurance agencies, are well positioned to support mutual learning of HEIs through presentation of evaluation results and analysis of the conditions that led to these. Peer learning from developments in various EHEA countries in the form of seminars or projects is very important.

**If the advice of the conference participants and European stakeholders represented herein is taken up to completely elevate the joint programmes from the national contexts and to exempt them from the national requirements, agreement is also needed that this new type of European joint degree is explicitly recognised by local authorities as comparable to the qualifications assigned to the first-, second- or third-cycle and corresponding national degrees.** These European qualifications may or may not be included in the national qualification frameworks, but proper wording in national legislation or any other kind of recognition guidelines needs to be explicitly included, thereby securing students' rights to full recognition of such degrees at home, throughout the EHEA, and in regions beyond.

**Stocktaking on national implementation and close monitoring by the BFUG working structure and by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee must continue.** Approaching BFUG and providing input towards relevant reporting is a task for all consultative partners of the Bologna Process,

and the moment for this is approaching with the Ministerial meeting in Paris less than a year away.

The conference participants are also conscious that there are still questions associated with implementation of joint programmes with non-EHEA countries, but left these for exploration on other occasions.

### **Concluding remarks**

Stakeholders present at the Vilnius conference, including higher education institutions, external quality assurance agencies, ENQA, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, EQAR, ECA, and ENIC/NARIC networks universally acknowledged that solutions to aid implementation of joint programmes and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance should be actively sought by both following top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The organisers of the Vilnius conference hope that the event gave a boost to finding solutions for single accreditation of joint programmes by inducing, triggering and

reinforcing national discussions for making the legal regulations of joint programmes more flexible and compatible with the already adopted *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*. Revision of national legislation on higher education and resolution of issues stemming from other legislation, when national administrative law has to be applied in accreditation procedures, is inevitably required. Legal actions are needed to guarantee that commonly agreed quality assurance decisions concerning joint programmes are fully and formally accepted in all countries concerned, which removes the burdensome obligation for joint programmes to undergo accreditation according to the various legislation of all the countries involved.

We believe it is possible to overcome the existing barriers in the accreditation of joint programmes in Europe by demonstrating political will, by promoting and raising awareness of the issue (communicating) and by researching the status quo and ways forward – this approach would address the issue of trust. Trust comes with working together.





# Annexes

## Annex: Contributors

### INTRODUCTION



#### Dr Inga Žalėnienė

Inga Žalėnienė graduated from Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania in 2001. After graduation she joined the Department of Law at the “Lithuanian Savings Bank” listed company and worked as a legal adviser while lecturing in the field of Family Law at Mykolas Romeris University.

Dr Žalėnienė completed PhD studies in Law in 2006. She was then appointed as Vice-Dean of the Law Faculty of Mykolas Romeris University in 2009 and responsible for the development of education policy, formation and coordination of research groups, organization of scientific project activities, and planning and accounting of scientific

results. Dr Žalėnienė was appointed Vice-Rector for Research and International Relations in 2012, then Vice-Rector for Education and Research in 2017, and currently holds this position.

In 2016, Dr Žalėnienė was elected Administrative Board Member of the International Association of Universities, a UNESCO-based international association of higher education institutions. As administrative board members, the Vice-Rector and other board members of the IAU ensure that the decisions of the General Conference are implemented and guide the work of the International Universities Bureau.



#### Françoise Profit

Contact: [francoise.profit@enseignementsup.gouv.fr](mailto:francoise.profit@enseignementsup.gouv.fr)

Françoise Profit is Head of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) Secretariat.

She was Head of the Office of Medical and Paramedical Studies in the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research in charge of structural reforms in that field, and in particular the changes generated by the application of the Bologna Process to medical/paramedical studies.

Françoise was Deputy Head of the Office in charge of Masters and Doctoral Studies in the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research. In 2012–2013, she was a national delegate in the ad-hoc working group on the third cycle member of the Bologna Process in charge of promoting quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle. From 2011 to 2013, she was project manager in charge of the national pedagogical call for tender in the framework of the French programmes of excellence.

From 2004 to 2010, she was Head of the French ENIC NARIC centre for recognition of foreign qualifications. She was involved during that time in the network as a participant in projects and as President of the ENIC network from 2007 to 2009 and President of the MERIC network in 2010.

As an expert, she contributed to many studies, especially the Study on the Diploma Supplement as seen by its users in cooperation with ENQA and on professional recognition in the framework of the publications of the Council of Europe. She acted as independent consultant for the PAP ESR project in 2015 aiming to implement the Bologna tools in Algeria.

Françoise Profit holds a Licence in French Literature and Language (Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, France), a Maîtrise in French Linguistic (Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, France) and a Master's in Information-Communication/Documentation (Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, Paris, France).



## Dr Giedrius Viliūnas

Currently Vice-Minister at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

2010–2016 Vice-Rector for Education at Mykolas Romeris University, Assistant Professor of the Institute for Political Sciences of MRU. 2009–2010 Head of the Department of Research Policy at the Research Council of Lithuania, 2007–2009 Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2002–2007 Public and Professional Adviser to the Minister of Education and Science.

From 1989 until 2007 he held the positions of lecturer, researcher and associate professor at Vilnius University, 1996–2006 headed the Department of Lithuanian Literature.

## Henrik Wärnhjelm

Henrik Wärnhjelm is the Head of Frontex Training Unit and hence responsible for Frontex's training activities, i.e. the development and implementation of common educational standards, pre-deployment training, training support for border and coast guard functions, and the development and maintenance of networks and infrastructures for education and training.

Before joining Frontex in 2012 Henrik was the District Commander of West Finland Coast Guard district for almost 10 years. In this position he was responsible for all operational activities of the border guard in Western Finland. His work experience in the field of border management extends from 1980. He has been responsible for a

Dr Viliūnas was serving as a board member and expert in various strategic and advisory bodies, including, among others, the Council for Evaluation of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions, State Commission of Lithuanian Language, Lithuanian Research Council, Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation, CREST committee of the European Commission and Council of the European Union, Higher Education Council of Lithuania. He is currently the country representative in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) of the European Higher Education Area, member of the Board of Governors of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission.

Dr Viliūnas has authored and edited more than 10 books, a number of research and policy papers on science, higher education, and Lithuanian literature.

wide range of duties, from the performance of daily border and coast guard tasks to the planning and management of border and coast guard training as well as the management of the operational and administrative processes. He has also gained experience in the activities of other security-related organisations and in the development of interoperability and cooperation.

As a former member of the management team of the Finnish Border Guard, he has actively contributed to the development and implementation of strategies in the field of border management. He is a general staff officer and holds in addition a Master's in political science with a focus on international maritime law.



## PLENARY CONTRIBUTIONS



### Anemona Peres

Anemona Peres is programme manager in the Frontex Training Unit, leading the Educational Standards Area. She is responsible for the development and implementation of common core learning standards for border guard education and training at all levels across the EU, promoting good practice in training design and quality assurance. Most recently she was project manager of the European Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding (SQF), and of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management.

She has worked for over 14 years as a psychologist and training officer within the Romanian Border Police, providing psychological assistance to the operational missions, and advising on organisational development, work psychology and training matters. She has designed and delivered

courses for further training of border police senior officers and police trainers in Management and Organisational Development, Judicial Psychology and Training Methodology. Starting in 2005, at the Headquarters of the Romanian Border Police, she was in charge of the EU pre- and post-accession assistance programmes as Head of the Capacity Building component and programme manager for the Schengen Facility.

Ms Peres holds several degrees in psychology and education from West University of Timisoara, Babes Bolyai University Cluj Napoca and the University of Nottingham. She is currently working on a doctorate in quality assurance and validation of European border guard qualifications and its impact on harmonisation of border guard education and training across the EU.



### Dr Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė

Contact: [ingajp@mruni.eu](mailto:ingajp@mruni.eu)

Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė has worked for over 17 years in higher education with responsibility for the development and implementation of the HEI quality assurance system, including overall coordination of internal and external quality evaluation and improvement of study programmes in Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She has extensive project writing and administration experience. She managed national and international projects designed for the development of the internal quality assurance systems, the development of quality culture, the integration of international/intercultural dimensions into higher education, the preparation and implementation of joint programmes, development of teachers' intercultural competence, the improvement of quality of higher education and the creation of the internationalization assumptions in Lithuanian higher education institutions.

She is an expert on assessment of quality and internationalisation of HEIs and study programmes.

For almost ten years Inga has had an academic interest in the quality assurance and internationalization of higher education. She has been appointed for the term 2015 to 2021 as Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee by the Governing Board of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management implemented by a consortium of six European HEIs and the EU Frontex agency.

Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė holds a Bachelor's and Master's in Political Sciences (Klaipėda University, Lithuania), a Master's in Management (Vilnius University, Lithuania), as well as a PhD in Educational science (Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania).

## CONFERENCE SESSIONS

### Accreditation practices of joint programmes around European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management

#### Nora Skaburskienė

Nora Skaburskienė has worked in the field of quality assurance since 2001. She became the Head of Institutional Review Division in 2009 and served as the Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Lithuania from 2013. In 2017 she was elected as SKVC Director.

Currently, Nora is a board member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). She is also involved in the working group of the ENQA on the quality assurance of e-learning and is an acting member of the National Bologna Follow-Up Group.

Nora has extensive experience in coordinating study programme assessments while also managing the work of the Division. She has contributed to the drafting of various legal acts and methodologies. She has wide-ranging experience of participating in local and international projects, with the tasks varying from research activities, training, to leading project teams. For two years she acted as the national representative of Lithuania in the EC 7FP "People" Committee.

Nora graduated in Communication and Information Sciences from Vilnius University (Lithuania).



#### Dr Andrejs Rauhvargers

Contact: [Andrejs.rauhvargers@aic.lv](mailto:Andrejs.rauhvargers@aic.lv)

Andrejs Rauhvargers was born 1952 in Riga, Latvia and has a PhD in Chemistry from the University of Latvia and held a post-doctoral fellowship at Jyväskylä University, Finland.

He has been the Head of the Quality Assurance Agency of Latvia since 2015.

Before moving to the Quality Agency he was Secretary General of the Latvian Rectors' Conference and professor at the University of Latvia. Andrejs has also served as the Deputy State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, participating in the development of the legislation for higher education. He was closely involved in the establishment of a system for higher education quality assurance in Latvia and coordination of this work with the neighbouring countries of Estonia and Lithuania as well as in establishing systems for recognition of the foreign credentials of Latvia.

For six years Andrejs was Senior Advisor at the European University Association. He is a member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group

and since 2005 has chaired the working group studying the progress in the 'Bologna' countries and preparing the Bologna Stocktaking reports published between 2005 and 2015.

He also has international experience in the field of recognition of foreign qualifications: from 1997 he has served as president of the European Network of Academic Recognition Centres (ENIC) and from 2001- of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and has written a number of publications in the field of recognition and various Bologna Process aspects.

Andrejs has also been co-editor of several volumes of the Council of Europe Higher Education series.

Since the very beginning of the Bologna Process in 1999, he has worked to help ensure that the European Higher Education Area will be a reality, particularly in the fields of joint degrees, qualification frameworks and recognition of qualifications.





### **Dr Mark Frederiks**

Dr Mark Frederiks is coordinator of international policy and a member of Team Flanders of NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. Since 2004 he is also Coordinator of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). For five years he was Administrator of the International Network of QA Agencies INQAAHE. He was a member of the Bologna Expert Group that prepared the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes which was adopted by the EHEA Ministers in Yerevan. Mark coordinated four EU funded projects and was an expert in QA reviews in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Slovenia and

Sweden. He coordinated the verification of the alignment of the Dutch and Flemish NQFs with the EHEA QF, participated as an expert in the NQF verification committee in Portugal, and advised on the NQF in Georgia.

Before joining NVAO, Mark worked with the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, and was a researcher at CHEPS/University of Twente and Open University UK. He has (co-) authored some 40 publications in the field of quality assurance in higher education.



### **Sandra Marcos Ortega**

Contact: [marortsa@jcyl.es](mailto:marortsa@jcyl.es)

Sandra Marcos Ortega is Head of International Affairs and Institutional Quality at ACSUCYL (Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León) Spain. She has a Master's in Information Systems Management and Bachelor's degree in Information Management. She has 12 years of experience in management and design of internal and external quality assurance processes in higher education in both the national and international spheres, as well as in the management and development of international projects in cooperation with quality assurance agencies in the European area and beyond.

Since 2015 Sandra has been Chair of the IQA-ENQA Group (Standing Committee of

ENQA). For three years she has also been a member of the IQA Group of ENQA and of the KP3 (Knowledge on part 3 of the ESG). She was a member in ACSUCYL's Advisory Board 2007–2015. She is responsible for the management of the design, development and follow-up of strategic plans; design, implementation and development of the Management Quality System in ACSUCYL according to the ISO Standard 9001; carrying out of audits of the Management Quality Systems in Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education; assessment and accreditation of university degree programmes. She has managed more than 400 assessments in the last two years and developed audits at Universities as well as guides and procedure manuals for higher education institutions.

## Lagle Zobel

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Lagle Zobel has been a lawyer of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) since 2010.

Lagle is responsible for drawing up draft decisions for the EKKA Quality Assessment Council and ensuring the compliance of EKKA's assessment regulations with national legislation and regulations on the assessment of higher education. She cooperates with lawyers of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research in amending legislation and provides legal advice to educational institutions and experts in external evaluation issues.

In 2015 Lagle accompanied an assessment panel as an observer on a study visit at the Netherlands Defence Academy during the

accreditation process of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management, opened in cooperation with Frontex. Subsequently, she made proposals to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research for amending the legislation concerning joint study programmes.

Since 2014 she has been actively involved as a part-time expert in the legal component of several EU Twinning projects in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 2015 she participated in the development and implementation of accreditation of Master's of law study programmes in the Republic of Moldova.

Lagle Zobel holds a Master's in law from the University of Tartu, Estonia.



## Two years after Yerevan: progress so far

### Tia Loukkola

Contact: [tia.loukkola@eua.be](mailto:tia.loukkola@eua.be)

Tia Loukkola is the director of Institutional Development at the European University Association (EUA). In this capacity she has overall responsibility for the Association's activities that aim to support EUA's member universities in developing their institutional capacity in quality assurance, doctoral education and learning & teaching. In the field of quality assurance this includes the management of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme, the European Quality Assurance Forum and various projects run by the association as well as representing EUA in European level policy discussions, and recently in the revision of

the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Tia is a regular speaker at higher education conferences in Europe and beyond and has authored several publications and articles in her field of expertise.

Before joining EUA in April 2008 she worked at the University of Turku in Finland for 10 years in various capacities both in faculty and central administration. She holds a Master's in French and culture from the same university.





### Colin Tück

Colin Tück is the Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). He has been working for EQAR since October 2007, initially as Project Manager on behalf of its founding members (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE).

He was a member of the Steering Group for the revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European

Higher Education Area (ESG), and is a co-author of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes.

Prior to joining EQAR Colin was involved in quality assurance-related topics as a member of the European Students Union's (ESU, formerly ESIB) Bologna Process Committee and of the Executive Board of the National Union of Students in Germany (fzs).



### Dr Achim Hopbach

Achim Hopbach has been working in higher education since 1997. Before taking up his current post as Managing Director of the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (AQ Austria) in 2012, he was the Managing Director of the German Accreditation Council for 7 years.

Achim held and holds various positions in quality assurance agencies and associations, such as President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) from 2009 to 2013; member of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) from 2005 to 2013; member of

the University Quality International Board (UQAIB), Dubai, since 2015; member of the Board of the Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Faculties (AVEPRO), Holy See, since 2016.

He works on international consultancy projects, including in Southeast Asia and Africa and has published numerous articles on the Bologna Process, quality assurance and qualification frameworks.

Achim holds a Master's in History, Political Science and Law (University of Heidelberg, Germany) and a PhD in History (University of Heidelberg, Germany).



### Dr Jürgen Petersen

Contact: [petersen@zeva.org](mailto:petersen@zeva.org)

Jürgen Petersen joined ZEVA (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover) in 2011 and currently heads ZEVA's division of institutional accreditation. In addition to national and international accreditation and QA-procedures he is responsible for strategic development and the capacity building of peers/experts. Since 2012 he has been a member of ECA's (European Consortium for Accreditation) Board which he has chaired since 2016.

Before joining ZEVA, Jürgen worked in several positions in higher education institutions (University of Göttingen, University of Zürich, Goethe-University Frankfurt/M.)

and was involved in the development, implementation and teaching of study programmes in the Social Sciences.

He has been a researcher in several projects, including "Polling and Political Representation in a Comparative Perspective" (Swiss National Science Foundation) and "The Political Class in Advanced Democracies" (VolkswagenStiftung) and took part in the strategic development of further individual and cooperative projects. His research interests now include higher education reforms as policy processes, including their socio-political basis.

## Allan Bruun Pedersen

Contact: [abp@ufm.dk](mailto:abp@ufm.dk)

Allan Bruun Pedersen is a senior adviser at the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Danish ENIC-NARIC Office.

He is an experienced recognition expert and elected Vice President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau. He was previously President and Vice President of the ENIC network, the recognition network of the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Allan is currently a member of two BFUG working groups, one on implementation of structural reforms dealing with recognition, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and transparency tools, and the other on the revision of the Diploma Supplement.

He was also previously a member of several BFUG working groups and of the pathfinder group on automatic recognition.

He has appeared as an expert on recognition at numerous conferences in Europe and beyond and as a consultant on recognition projects in Georgia, Germany and other countries. He is also in charge of the National Contact Point for the Danish Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Allan holds a Master's in History and Eastern and Central European Studies from Copenhagen and Roskilde University.



## GROUP DISCUSSIONS SESSIONS

### Aurelija Valeikiene

Contact: [aurelija.valeikiene@skvc.lt](mailto:aurelija.valeikiene@skvc.lt)

Aurelija Valeikiene has been Deputy Director of the Center for Quality Assurance in Higher Education since 2004, and also Head of the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC.

She was a member of various working groups drafting national legislation in credentials evaluation and quality assurance of higher education in Lithuania. In 2012–2015 she was a national delegate in the working group on structural reforms in the Bologna Process, encompassing topics of national qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, and transparency. From 2015 to 2018 she is serving on the BFUG Advisory Group to Support Belarus on the Roadmap to EHEA.

Aurelija served as treasurer and board member, then as President of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

(CEENQA). She was a member of the ENQA Board as well as several working groups on staff development, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications, and internal quality assurance for quality assurance agencies. She contributed towards developing a revised model of quality agency reviews against ESG-2015.

She acts as an independent consultant and expert for the Council of Europe, the World Bank, ENQA, the European Training Foundation, and other organisations. She has extensive project writing, administration and management experience and has served as an expert in 13 international projects.

Aurelija holds a Bachelor's in Philosophy (Vilnius University, Lithuania) and a Master's of Science in Management (New York University, USA).



# Annex: Steering Committee of the Conference

## Steering committee for the International conference

### “Single Accreditation of Joint programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality”

May 30–31, 2017, Vilnius

<b>Chair</b>	
Inga Žalėnienė	Vice-Rector for Education and Research, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
<b>Members</b>	
Mette Moerk Andersen	Policy Officer, Unit B1 – Higher Education, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission
Myriame Bollen	Chair of Programme Board of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, Netherlands Defence Academy Breda, The Netherlands
Nuria Carriedo Lopez	Vice-Rector for Academic Coordination, National Distance Education University, Spain
Achim Hopbach	Director of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (Austria)
Inga Juknytė-Petrekienė	Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Rosario Martín Ruano	Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Salamanca, Spain
Anemona Peres	Project manager of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, Frontex, EU Agency
Françoise Profit	Head of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat
Andres Pung	Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Estonia
Norma Ryan	Professor, University College Cork, Ireland
Gunārs Strods	Vice-Rector for Cooperation and Development, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia
Aurelija Valeikienė	Deputy Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania
Giedrius Viliūnas	Vice-Minister, Ministry of Education and Science, Lithuania
Nora Skaburskienė	Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania



# Annex: Agenda of the Conference

## International conference

### “Single Accreditation of Joint programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality”

May 30–31, 2017, Vilnius

## Programme

### 1<sup>st</sup> Conference Day: 30 May 2017

Venue: Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities Street 20, Vilnius, I-414 Room

9.00–9.30	Welcome coffee, registration
9.30–11.00	<p><b>Opening session</b></p> <p><b>Welcome by the opening session's Chair</b> – Dr Inga Žalėnienė, Vice-Rector for Education and Research, Mykolas Romeris University</p> <p><b>Opening speeches</b> by</p> <p>Ms Françoise Profit – Head of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat</p> <p>Ms Mette Moerk Andersen – Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission</p> <p>Mr Marius Ablačiškis – Adviser to the Minister, Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania</p> <p>Mr Henrik Warnhjelm, Head of the Training Unit, Frontex, EU Agency</p> <p><b>Introductions</b></p> <p>Presentation by Ms Anemona Peres – Project Manager of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, Frontex, EU Agency: <i>A brief history of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management</i></p> <p>Presentation by Major Pascal Wolf – Commanding Officer Border Guard Brigade, The Netherlands, student of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management</p> <p>Presentation by Dr Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė – Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management, Mykolas Romeris University: <i>Challenges for single accreditation of joint programmes: the case of the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management</i></p>
11.00–11.30	Coffee break
11.30–13.00	<p><b>Plenary session: Accreditation practices of joint programmes around the European Joint Master's programme in Strategic Border Management</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Prof. Dr Norma Ryan, University College Cork, Ireland</p> <p>Presentation by Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania</p> <p>Presentation by Dr Andrejs Rauhvargers, Head of the Higher Education Quality Agency (AIC), Latvia</p> <p>Presentation by Dr Mark Frederiks, Coordinator of International Policy at Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), The Netherlands</p> <p>Presentation by Ms Sandra Marcos Ortega, Head of International Relations and the Institutional Quality Department of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL), Spain</p> <p>Presentation by Ms Lagle Zobel, Lawyer of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA), Estonia</p> <p>Questions up to 15 min.</p>
13.00–14.30	Lunch

## 1<sup>st</sup> Conference Day: 30 May 2017

Venue: Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities Street 20, Vilnius, I-414 Room

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14:30–15:45	<p><b>Plenary session I: Two years after Yerevan: progress so far</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Luis Delgado Martínez, Advisor, Internationalization of Higher Education, Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (Spain)</p> <p>Presentation by Ms Tia Loukkola, Director, Institutional Development of the European University Association (EUA)</p> <p>Presentation by Mr Johan Cloet, former Secretary General of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)</p> <p>Presentation by Dr Achim Hopbach, former President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)</p> <p>Presentation by Mr Colin Tück, Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) Secretariat</p> <p>Questions up to 15 min.</p>
15:45–16:15	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
16:15–17:15	<p><b>Plenary session II: Two years after Yerevan: progress so far (continued)</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Mr Luis Delgado Martínez, Advisor, Internationalization of Higher Education, Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (Spain)</p> <p>Presentation by Mr Adam Gajek, Executive Committee Member of the European Student Union (ESU)</p> <p>Presentation by Dr Jürgen Petersen, Chair of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) in higher education secretariat</p> <p>Presentation by Mr Allan Bruun Pedersen, Vice-President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau, Senior Adviser of ENIC/NARIC, The Danish Agency for Science and Education</p> <p>Questions up to 15 min.</p>
18:30	<p><b>Official dinner with musical intermezzo</b></p>

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## 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference Day: 31 May 2017

Venue: Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities Street 20, Vilnius

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9.00–9:30	Welcome coffee
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9:30–9.45	<b>Room I-414</b> Review of the 1 <sup>st</sup> day of the conference by Ms Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania
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09:45–10:45	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round discussion</b> <b>Three parallel break-up sessions of group discussions on the challenges, problems and obstacles for single accreditation of joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area</b>
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	<b>Room I-407</b> Group 1 <b>Moderated by:</b> Mr Andrius Zalitis, Vice President of Lithuanian Students Union	<b>Room I-416</b> Group 2 <b>Moderated by:</b> Dr Øystein Lund, Deputy Director General, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)	<b>Room I-417</b> Group 3 <b>Moderated by:</b> Dr Frank Petrikowski, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany
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10:45 – 11:15	Coffee break
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11:15 – 11.45	<b>Room I-414</b> <b>Chairperson:</b> Prof. Dr Myriame Bollen, Netherlands Defence Academy, The Netherlands Reporting from the group discussions: the outcomes of the group discussions based on the experience, expertise and insights of the particular group of HE stakeholders Mr Andrius Zalytis, Dr Øystein Lund, Dr Frank Petrikowski
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11:45–12:45	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round discussion</b> <b>Three parallel break-up sessions of group discussions on actions needed to implement single accreditation of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management.</b>
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	<b>Room I-407</b> Group 1 <b>Moderated by:</b> Ms Maria Kelo, Director of ENQA Secretariat	<b>Room I-416</b> Group 2 <b>Moderated by:</b> Ms Christina Rozsnyai, Member of ENQA Board, Programme Officer for Foreign Affairs at the Hungarian Accreditation Committee	<b>Room I-417</b> Group 3 <b>Moderated by:</b> Dr Julie Norris, Former Head of Training at the Garda College – Irish police, Training manager in Interpol, independent expert
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12:45–14:00	Lunch
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14:00–15:00	<b>Room I-414</b> <b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Achim Hopbach, Director, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, Austria <b>Reporting from the group discussions:</b> findings of the group discussions on the steps to be taken by different groups of HE stakeholders in national countries for single accreditation of joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area. Ms Maria Kelo, Ms Christina Rozsnyai, Dr Julie Norris <b>Closing session (discussion): Further actions promoting single accreditation of joint programmes in the European Higher Education Area.</b> Discussion on the issues to be addressed internationally and nationally to the responsible organizations and institutions for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Wrap-up of the conference.
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15:00–15:30	Farewell coffee, departure of the participants
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## Annex: About Conference Organisers

European  
Joint Master's  
in  
**Strategic  
Border Management**

### EUROPEAN JOINT MASTER'S IN STRATEGIC BORDER MANAGEMENT

*“The common European border guard culture needs leadership”*

The activities of Frontex in the field of border guard education aim to promote a European border guard culture with high standards on fundamental rights, ethics and leadership. The rationale for developing a European joint Master's programme is to be found in the aim of Frontex to develop common European learning standards for border guard officers (common core curricula), and the necessity to create frameworks for engaging law enforcement officers in various forms of exchange and mobility programmes and to contribute to the development of a common culture and common approach to European border security, in accordance with Frontex's mandate in the field of border guard training.

The rationale for developing European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management has its roots in Frontex regulation which stipulates the development of common European learning standards for Border Guard Officers (common core curricula). It is also informed by the **Stockholm Programme** that emphasizes the necessity to create frameworks for engaging law enforcement officers in various forms of exchange and mobility programmes, to contribute to the development of a common culture and common approach to European border security, in accordance with Frontex mandate in the field of Border Guard training.

The European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management is a unique opportunity to study in a joint programme where the leading expertise is drawn from across the European Union (EU), valuing cooperation between operational and academic approaches and encouraging peer-learning.

The ethos of the programme has at its core the enhancement of interoperability at EU borders and harmonisation of learning and professional standards whilst respecting diversity, in line with the Bologna Process. The Master's is inclusive of international expertise for delivery of the programme and is accessible to all EU organisations with a border guard function. The programme is designed in accordance with the highest standards of higher education in the European Higher Education Area as a programme where the learning has practical application for the Member States (MS) and Schengen Associated Countries (SAC) Border Guard organisations, who are the ultimate beneficiaries.

The need to achieve a European border guard (BG) common culture resides in the BG organisations' role as drivers of organisational culture and organisational change, to promote a culture within the organisations that integrates shared EU values and facilitates that border guards at all levels (from front-line operational officers to specialists and managers) work together and that they understand and apply common practices and EU procedures, therefore increasing the deployability of BG experts in joint operations. The programme's focus on strategic leadership and European cooperation contributes to BG organisations' development in this respect.

This European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management constitutes 90 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. The duration of the programme is 18 months, during which the students study in a different institution together with their peers in the classroom. It is delivered over three stages. Each stage represents one semester of full-time study, carrying 30 ECTS credits.

Upon graduation, the students are awarded a joint diploma of a European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management that is signed by all the academic partners and recognised internationally as a Master's degree.

### **Common culture and best expertise from across the EU**

The programme supports an integrated strategic and intelligence-driven approach to border management. It aims to apply management principles to organisational development. It promotes European harmonisation and the interoperability of border guard activities by training the future leaders in line with common European learning standards, philosophy and values.

The teachers are academics and experienced operational officers from across the EU that have an outstanding ability to transfer their knowledge, skills and competences to the students in an interactive and applied manner.

### **Academic and professional excellence**

The European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management has been developed under the lead of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). Over 20 Member States (MS), Schengen associated countries (SACs) and partner organisations joined their efforts, knowledge and experience to create European border guard higher education.

The programme is delivered by a consortium of Frontex and Europe's leading universities in collaboration with border guard academies and training institutions that contribute operational expertise: Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Estonia), University of Salamanca (Spain), National University for Distance-Learning Education (Spain), Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Latvia), and Netherlands Defence Academy Faculty of Military Science (the Netherlands).

### **Distinct student experience**

Academic Partners of the Consortium provide inspiring locations for studies and offer first class academic facilities. The flexible learning paradigm uses a blended learning approach including e-learning solutions. This facilitates access to the programme for busy officers and allows them to remain connected to the operational environment and their job needs as well as to their study group.

The students benefit from the extensive resources available in the different institutions as well as from the European reach of the alumni of the programme. The programme offers its students unparalleled opportunities — the chance to exploit the resources of the top institutions while simultaneously meeting students from all over Europe, and to earn a truly European degree.

The joint programme creates exciting networking opportunities.



## FRONTEX – THE EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY

The **European Border and Coast Guard Agency** (EBCCG), commonly called **Frontex** (from French: *Frontières extérieures* for “external borders”), is an agency of the European Union headquartered in Warsaw, Poland, tasked with border control of the European Schengen Area, in coordination with the border and coast guards of Schengen Area Member States.

### Mission and Tasks of the Agency

The mission of Frontex – the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – is to promote, coordinate and develop European border management in line with the EU fundamental rights charter and the concept of Integrated Border Management.

Apart from Frontex’s specific mandate tasks such as:

- ♦ **monitoring migratory flows** and carrying out risk analysis regarding all aspects of integrated border management;
- ♦ **carrying out a vulnerability assessment**;
- ♦ **monitoring the management of the external borders**;
- ♦ **coordinating and organising joint operations** and **rapid border interventions to assist Member States** at the external borders;
- ♦ **supporting search and rescue operations**;
- ♦ **deploying European Border and Coast Guard teams**, including a **rapid reaction pool** for joint operations and rapid border interventions;
- ♦ **creating a technical equipment pool**;
- ♦ **providing support at hotspot areas with screening, debriefing, identification and fingerprinting**;
- ♦ **supporting the development of technical standards for equipment**;
- ♦ **deploying equipment, border guards and other staff from the rapid reaction pool**; **assisting Member States in fulfilling their return obligations**;
- ♦ **fighting organised cross-border crime and terrorism** at the external borders by supporting Member States in cooperation with Europol and Eurojust;

- ♦ **setting up pools of forced-return monitors, forced-return escorts and return specialists**;
- ♦ **setting up and deploying return intervention teams** during return interventions;
- ♦ **developing and operating information systems**;
- ♦ **assisting in the development and operation of EUROSUR** and the development of a common information-sharing environment;
- ♦ **supporting Member States’ coast guard authorities** through cooperation with the European Fisheries Control Agency and the European Maritime Safety Agency; providing services, information, equipment and training, and coordinating multipurpose operations, and
- ♦ **assisting technical and operational cooperation between Member States and third countries**.

Frontex also promotes training as one of its core tasks by way of **supporting the training of Member States’ border guards**, other relevant staff and experts, including through establishing common training standards as well as **participating in research and innovation** activities.

### Principles

Every country has its own border security needs. While sea borders are the focus of islands like Cyprus and Malta, other countries, such as Austria, have no sea border but are surrounded by land borders. Similarly, the systems and structures each country uses vary enormously — some have specialist border guards, while others use police units or other authorities for border control. Hence, each EU Member State has its own training solutions. In order for the border authorities of all these countries to work together to the same standards, common principles need to be established, and this is where Frontex comes in.

Frontex’s vision is to represent excellence in border guard education and training,

promoting the development of a common European border guard culture with high professional and ethical standards. This is achieved by supporting capacity building in Member States and Partner Countries, and by developing and implementing harmonised, learner-centred and cost-effective training products, based on the implementation of an integrated border management approach.

Frontex training activities are carried out on the basis of regular activities and training projects that are designed through the joint efforts of Frontex and experts from Member States, supported by other EU Agencies and international organisations. Courses are mainly targeted towards trainers who can train other border guards in their country, in their own language. Standardised results are ensured through the use of Frontex training tools and through guidelines given to multiplier trainers. With this approach, all border guard officers can be trained to the same training standards in their mother tongue.

Frontex target learners are European law enforcement officers with a Border Guard function at all levels. Frontex has developed and supported the national implementation

of the common standards for border guard basic education (CCC). The organisation delivers standardized courses for mid-level border guards (MLC), and provides a wide range of specialized further training courses (stolen vehicles, false documents, training for Schengen evaluators, interviewing officers, etc.). It also delivers “operational” training programmes designed to ensure harmonized performance and a high level of interoperability in joint operations and common missions at EU borders.

The training activities aim at building capacities in four main areas:

- Educational Standards
- European Border Guard Team (EBGT) Training
- Thematic Training Support
- Training infrastructures and networks

Frontex uses different training approaches: training sessions, e.g. face-to-face; blended or online and self-directed learning, e.g. e-learning tools and mobility/exchange programmes. Education and training for border guards in the Member States are aligned to the Bologna and Copenhagen principles and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).



## CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION (SKVC)

The main objectives of SKVC (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education) are to promote the quality of activities of higher education institutions and contribute to the creation of favourable conditions for the free movement of people.

Established in 1995, SKVC is the only external quality assurance agency responsible for evaluation of all types of higher education institutions in Lithuania (state and private, universities and colleges). SKVC also acts as a local ENIC/NARIC office carrying out academic recognition of foreign credentials and providing information on higher education systems and qualifications recognition.

SKVC not only evaluates and monitors the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes, but also contributes towards drafting legal acts, offers advice including relevant examples of the best international practices, and develops various guidelines. We provide training for academics and administrative staff, including top-level managers of universities

and colleges, and also for high school graduates, students, and labour market representatives on issues of quality and recognition of qualifications.

Internationalisation is a key aspect of our activities, and cooperation with many stakeholders both locally and at European level are among our cherished values. The independence, professionalism and quality of SKVC are attested by the fact that after a positive external review regarding compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), SKVC became a full member of ENQA (European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies) and listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). SKVC is also a full member of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and a founding member of CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education).



## MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY

Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) is an international university located in Vilnius and Kaunas, Lithuania. Its modern, creative and entrepreneurial academic community has elevated MRU to the status of the leading university in social sciences and interdisciplinary research in Lithuania. MRU cooperates closely with over 300 universities, public and private institutions, and participates in academic, professional and intersectorial networks. MRU is a full member of the following international higher education organizations: International Association of Universities, European University Association, European Association for International Education, European-Asian Knowledge Consortium Social Technologies for Smart and Inclusive Society, etc.

Approximately 8 000 students are currently enrolled at MRU, while the university employs over 600 academic staff. The university offers more than 100 doctoral, master and bachelor study programmes, of which over 80% enjoy international accreditation. The most popular study programmes are law, management, public administration, psychology, social work, public security, etc. About 200 doctoral students study in the fields of law, management, psychology, philology, economics, and educational science.

MRU is structured within the Faculty of Economics and Finance Management, Faculty of Politics and Management, Faculty of Social Welfare, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Public Security and Business and Media School. Research and innovation is implemented at the Social Innovations Laboratory Network MRU LAB that includes 19 laboratories and the Research and Innovation Support Centre.

MRU fosters a culture of research and innovation: carries out fundamental and applied research; takes part in national and international research programmes and projects; engages in contracted research; implements Ph.D. studies; organizes academic and mobility events; and widely disseminates research results. MRU's research and innovation is carried out in the framework of the interdisciplinary priority research area of Social Innovations for Global Growth and five research programmes:

- Justice, Security and Human Rights;
- Social Technologies;
- Sustainable Growth in the Context of Globalization;
- Improving the Quality of Life and Advancing Employment Opportunities, and
- Continuity and Change of Values in Global Society.







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