

Higher Education Reforms in Spain

Ministerio
de Educación, Cultura
y Deporte

HERE - **ES** Project



Quality Assurance
of Joint Programmes



Higher Education Reforms in Spain

HERE-ES Project **Peer Learning Activity** **on Quality Assurance of** **Joint Programmes**

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Introduction

The State Secretariat of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport MECD through the General Secretariat of Universities SGU in collaboration with the Spanish National Quality Agency ANECA, the Spanish Conference of University Rectors CRUE, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA and the European Student Union ESU, organized a Peer Learning Activity PLA on Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes QA of JP.

The PLA was organized within the project Higher Education Reforms in Spain HERE-ES, in the frame of the restricted call for proposals EACEA/2014 EHEA - Key Action 3 Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms.

The PLA on QA of JP was held on 9 - 10 November 2015 at the premises of University of Salamanca (Spain) and counted with a participation of around 40 participants coming from 10 countries, who were engaged in mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, concerns and ideas on QA of JP. Participants included vice-rectors of learning and teaching and internationalization, quality assurance agencies, ministry representatives and national ESU correspondents.

This publication shows a summary of the background documents, surveys and outcome of the discussions during the PLA.

Background

Introduction and context

The political will to enhance the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees has been evident in the European Higher Education Area, as well as in the European Union policies and programmes, since several years. At the same time, the establishment of such programmes, in particular where leading to a joint diploma, has been made more difficult by restrictions posed by national laws. Issues related to the quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes has been an important hindering factor in the establishment of joint programmes, as different – and sometimes even incompatible – national legislations, procedures and formal criteria stand on the way of creating such programmes and ensuring their status in the different national frameworks.

8 Over the past years QA agencies and stakeholders have tried to find ways to address the issue, including activities such as joint accreditation procedures or the establishment of bi- or multi-lateral recognition agreements. Many challenges remain however, including the time input required for joint procedures, and limiting recognition of decision to the partners of the agreements, for example. Also, it is not always easy to implement a procedure that takes truly into account the joint nature of the programme and considers it as a whole – rather than a sum of separately assessed and quality assured parts.

To address these issues, and to thus ensure that the creation of joint programmes in the EHEA is not hindered by the needed quality assurance or accreditation procedures, the BFUG established in 2013 an ad hoc expert group to elaborate a model for a European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The Approach was endorsed by the BFUG in November 2014 and by the Yerevan Ministerial Conference in May 2015.

The peer learning activity on QA of joint programmes will provide information on the current state of affairs in the provision and QA of joint programmes across Europe; present the European Approach for QA of joint programmes; identify existing and expected challenges

for joint programmes' QA; and facilitate exchange of good practice in this area.

After the PLA, the participants will be better informed on the current stage of JP in EHEA: the different methods for their quality assurance currently used; the main features of the European approach for QA of JP; identified shared challenges and expected benefits of the new Approach, and provided some recommendations for the future both to governments, QA agencies, HEIs, as well as to the European Commission regarding future support needs.

Participants and their selection

The event is intended for a maximum of 40 participants, who will engage in mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, concerns, and ideas on QA of joint programmes. In addition to the host country Spain, participants will be invited from 10 other countries. Furthermore, the ENIC/NARIC network representatives (Spain and European level), EQAR, and the European Commission - as well as some individual experts - will be invited to participate.

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A maximum of two participants will be invited from each country. Depending on the priorities of the countries in questions, one of the participants would be a representative of the QA agency, while the other one could be a representative of the Ministry, or of the higher education institutions (such as a the Rectors' Conference).

Pre-event task

The event will be based on and prepared through the completion of a pre-event tasks by all participants. The pre-event task information will form the basis for the country presentations during the PLA and will be based on the following items:

Current state of affairs in joint programmes – including estimates of their number – and their quality assurance, including identification of eventual good practice examples/related projects (this infor-

mation may also be used to identify the specific case examples to be presented during the PLA in more detail)

Existing and expected challenges in implementing the European Approach, consider the point of view of the QA agencies, the national authorities, and the HEIs

Current discussions and identifiable trends in establishment, running and quality assurance of joint programmes

A guide of content/template will be provided to the participants

Agenda

Monday, 9 November

8.30 Registrations

9.00 Welcome address

Ms. Maria Kelo. Director of ENQA

Ms. Klara Engels-Pereny. European Commission

Dr. Luis Delgado. Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports

Prof. Mariano Esteban. Vicerrector of Academic & Teaching.
USAL

9.20 Introduction to the HERE-ES Project

Dr. Luis Delgado. HERE-ES Project Coordinator

9.40 Introduction to the PLA and its objectives

Maria Kelo. ENQA

10.00 Session 1. Current state of Joint Programmes in Spain and in Europe

Chair: Luis Delgado

Current state of Joint Programmes in Spain

Paloma Collado. UNED

Current state of Joint Programmes in Europe

Nick Harris. ANECA

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 Session 2. QA of JP: how is it done currently?

Interactive interview of all participants

Facilitator: Nick Harris

12.30 Session 3. European level tools for QA of joint programmes

Chair: Maria Kelo

The European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes

Achim Hopbach, AQ Austria

The role of EQAR in QA of joint programmes

Colin Tueck, EQAR

13.30 Lunch

14.30 Session 4. Good practice: country examples – how do we do QA of joint programmes?

Chair: Rafael Llavori

- Erasmus Mundus. Adrian Veale. EC
- France, Belgium Flanders

16.00 Coffee break**16.30 Session 5. Structured discussion on ways to address QA of JP: respective benefits and challenges**

Facilitator Nick Harris:

- The MULTRA project. Mark Fredericks
- The Netherlands, Spain

17.30 End of the day**20.30 PLA Dinner****Tuesday, 10 November****9.00 Session 6. Joint programmes and recognition – can QA be a helpful tool?**

Chair: Luis Delgado

Kevin Guillaume, Former President ENIC-NARIC Network

9.30 Working groups

- Participants are divided into three groups by stakeholder group, facilitated by identified experts, and are to identify:
- Five main challenges for establishment of joint programmes and recommendations to the main actor group on how to address those challenges
- Five activities needed to implement the European Approach, with indication on who should take up responsibility for the activities (reforms, legal context, information and support activities, capacity building and training....)
- The main benefits and risks in adopting the European Approach, and ways to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks

- **WG1. Ministries:** MINOW, MES/DG ES, OND, CFWB, MINISW, MECD, EC
Facilitator: B. Banaszak (Poland). Rapporteur: Noel Vercruysse (BE-FI)
- **WG2. QA:** NVAO, GAC, A3S, SQAA, AEQES, PKA, HCERES, ANECA, ASUCYL, EC
Facilitator: João Duarte (Portugal). Rapporteur: Katrin Mayer-Lantermann
- **WG3. HEI:** CRUP, U Ghent, CCISP, ARES, CPU, CRUE, USAL, IPB, EC
Facilitator: R. Bonete (Spain). Rapporteur: Andries Verspeeten (BE-FI)

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 Feedback and discussion between the groups to draw overall conclusions of the PLA

Rapporteurs of the working groups
Chair Nick Harris

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12.30 Concluding Remarks

Luis Delgado. MECD
María Kelo. ENQA

13.00 Closure

Prof. Juan M^a Vázquez. Secretary General of Universities

13.15 End of the event and lunch

14:00 – 15:30. 3rd Meeting of the HERE-ES Project

Survey

Integration of information from the Pre Event

Task and feedback from the PLA Breakout Sessions

Table 1. Summary Feedback

from Break-out Group Discussions

	MINISTRIES	QA		AGENCIES	HEIs	
				Extra comments		Extra comments
Challenges	Regulatory frameworks	Different legislations		Recommendations: • Identify possible contradictions initially by consulting the QA agency • Dissemination of good practices (share of responsibilities, clear concepts, etc) • Transparency on different assessment systems and clear regulations on it • NO recommendations concerning tuition fees • Explain 'added value'	External: • Different legislations • Different procedures	'solutions': • clearer strategy • data platform • (more) internal flexibility • (more) incentives and recognition (of staff efforts)
	Lack of information (across almost all aspects)	(dealing with/ assessing) • management of consortium • 'joint-ness' • sustainability			Internal: • Definitions • Sustainability • Joint-ness • incentivising staff	
	Trust (different levels)	Dealing with different traditions in teaching and student assessment				
	Diversity / ambiguity (of interpretations)	Different tuition fee arrangements				
	Political will	Lack of awareness by students and employers				
Activities	Enabling regulatory frameworks	Allow agencies to apply EA			"take away ignorance as a source of mistrust"	
	Data collection	Translate into QA agency Guidelines			'translation' of EA into national legislation	
	More Peer Learning by 'doing' (not 'talking')	Organisation of seminars by key actors			(more) Information at • Institutional level • Staff (bottom up) (more) AWARENESS	
	(encourage) stakeholder pressure					
	(raise) awareness of importance					
	(identify) differences in QA systems in eg: fees; timescales; ratings scales					
Benefits		More HEIs will be active in JPs and JDs			Procedure faster hence • Staff motivation • More JPS	
		Reduce QA workload for HEIs				
		Transparency of QA system				
		Enhance attractiveness of JPs - for countries		outside of EHEA to join		
Risks		Not accepting decisions made according to EA			The approach becoming too rigid	
		Choice of agency based on fee levels			'Eurocentrism' in JPs including outside of EHEA	

Consistent and contradictory main features from the Breakout Session Feedback

Prior to the Breakout Sessions the PLA was informed by a series of sessions and subsequent discussions. Based on these and pre-existing experiences and expertise the Breakout Sessions summarised the following:

Challenges

- Different regulatory frameworks, and different or ambiguous use of terms between them, were seen as a major impediment to the development / expansion of JPs in particular. Many noted that collaborations through programmes labelled as dual / multiple programmes could achieve (many of) the same goals but with far less difficulties.
- Different national regulatory requirements were seen as ‘not going away, at least in the short term’.
- Different teaching traditions, and particularly assessment practices.
- Issues relating to data – lack off, inconsistencies between, different uses of terminology, difficulties in finding – were highlighted.
- Resourcing and sustainability problems (at technical and personal/motivational levels) were commonly identified.

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A set of **Recommendations** to address Challenges were proposed including: identification of possible contradictions in terminologies etc. (initially through QAAs); dissemination of good practices - through shared ‘activities’; clarification regarding different assessment systems (with clear regulations where needed); identification/clarification of the specific (added) value of Joint Programmes.

Activities:

- All identified the need for a more consistent approach to regulatory frameworks, and where necessary incorpora-

tion of key aspects in national legislation. A (legal) problem here however is that different national legislations use different definitions for some of the key terms.

- All identified informed trust building as a key element – through discussions, comparisons and explanations. An identified paradox was, however, that the level of trust (and autonomy / motivation) and the extent of regulation (at national and institutional levels) are inversely correlated (regulation was reported as ‘demotivating’).

Benefits and Risks:

- There are clear benefits of a single, speedy, less resource intensive, evaluation procedure (leading to more motivation, more JPs etc.).
- But by its very nature, such a system could (if enshrined in national legislation) become a hindrance to innovation and ambition.
- Several noted a risk in seeking / seeming to enforce a ‘Eurocentric’ approach to programme evaluation on increasingly diverse, global partnerships.

Summary Conclusions from PET written evidence: (extract from a full Report)

A detailed analysis of the written evidence returned in the Pre-Event Task surveys is available elsewhere however a number of ‘cross cutting themes’, also reflected at the PLA itself could easily be identified:

‘Cross-cutting themes’ (from analysis of detailed written responses in the Pre Event Task)

A number of ‘cross-cutting’ themes and questions were found to recur irrespective of the phase of development or delivery of a JP, or its evaluation / quality assurance, and whether PET responses were from ministries, QA agencies or HEIs. These included:

- Why bother with Joint Programmes when Double/Multiple programmes are ‘easier’ to set up and run?
- What are Joint Programmes, and what is their ‘added value’? What are the relationships between modules, options and the overall Joint programme, concerning identification and assessment of JP-specific learning outcomes?
- Resourcing and sustainability concerns – financial, administrative and student records management, personnel.
- Academic management – from the strategic to the detailed – including intra-HEI relationships between Joint Programmes and Internationalisation.
- Quality assurance – general lack of alignment in both internal (inter- and intra- HEI) and external (between QA agencies) concerning needs, cycles, standards, criteria and procedures , and in the use of different definitions / interpretations of common (key) words.
- National legal frameworks and their (continuous) revisions; and the relationship between national policy/requirements and Bologna Process initiatives.

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Approaches to problem-solving during the development, delivery and QA of Joint Programmes

Various examples of ‘problem-solving’ were identified in both the PET and during the PLA. Generally these were of a more specific nature relating to, for example:

- a particular JP and its HEI consortium members,
- specific national (legal) policies, and (related) requirements and initiatives (sometimes related to BP initiatives)
- specific (intra-) QA agency and inter-QA agency projects and initiatives

Academic perspectives:

a number of specific JPs were described /referred to including:

- Strategic Border Management JM – with very substantial (FRONTEX) financial and administrative assistance this programme succeeded through extensive academic discussions in developing a uniquely and innovative transnational JP. Key academic features *included extensive and detailed discussions about programme content and development of student learning*. Also with: *extensive consortium administrative and academic documentation, especially including assessment and its consistency (QA including use of ‘eternal examiners’)*.
- EMLE (and other Erasmus Mundus JMs) a long established Erasmus Mundus JM (60 ECTS) widely regarded as an exemplar with many good practices. The key features identified in SBM are also present EMLE (and others).

QA perspectives

A number of QA agency projects were described / referred to including ENQA TEEP II, ECA TEAM I and II, JOQAR – methodology for JP single evaluation using one national framework (plus any additional required features), and MULTRA - mutual recognition of accreditation decisions (including JOQAR). The work and reports of these projects (from 2002 to current) provide a substantive, published, evidence base for policy development concerning the QA of JPs. It is encouraging to note that JOQAR/MULTRA has provided the first successful example of multiple (national) recognitions from a single evaluation of a JP. Even within this example however there were considerable difficulties in ensuring that the range of different national QA requirements were met; in one part national law was changed and in another part national law was not changed resulting in the removal of the respective HEI as a full partner in the consortium.

EHEA and national perspectives in the evaluation of JPs

A key feature of the PLA was the presentation of the new **European Approach** to evaluation of Joint Programmes (and related roles of EQAR). The European Approach, accepted by EHEA ministers, includes a set of Standards and Criteria and a Procedure for the single evaluation of a JP – with outcome validity across the EHEA *without the requirement for inclusion of specific national requirements*. Although optional, the **European Approach** can offer huge benefits to **JP consortia** in reducing their workload in relation to external evaluation and in particular to preparation for (multi country) accreditation.

National requirements are however at the heart of the ‘problems’ / paradoxes concerned with single evaluation of JPs. The PLA learnt of numerous examples of national requirements (in QA and in Recognition) that would need extensive legal interventions to overcome. By contrast the JOQAR/MULTRA approach retains essential national criteria but also within a single evaluation procedure.

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The inclusion of the **European Approach** into national legislation was proposed, whilst recognising that this could have the potential for codifying academic development and limiting innovation. Additionally it was noted that, since different countries use different definitions for Joint Programmes, this would probably require a reopening of an ‘academic’ debate towards a **single legal definition** for Joint Programmes (across the EHEA).

Outcome

Around 40 experts and representatives from several European countries (Spain, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia-Brussels, The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Portugal, France and Slovenia, representing national/regional ministries of higher education, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and other stakeholders such as the EC, ENQA, ESU, EQAR and ENIC-NARIC networks, met in Salamanca for the purpose of a Peer Learning Activity PLA on the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The PLA was organized by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD) in the framework of the Erasmus + project Higher Education Reforms in Spain. The HERE-ES PLA was led by MECD in collaboration with the Spanish Quality Agency ANECA, the Spanish Conference of Rectors CRUE, ENQA and ESU.

Based on intense and constructive discussions during the PLA, and considering the state of the art and recent trends on the subject presented by experts in the field, the participants noted that:

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On the implementation of Joint Programmes:

- A Joint Programme (JP) can lead to a Joint Degree (JD) or dual / multiple degrees.
- Joint Programmes (JP) and Joint Degrees (JD) should not be seen as goals in themselves but rather as a means to achieve national, European and worldwide objectives related with the enhancement of the quality of higher education. JPs enhance transnational cooperation, the possibilities for internationalization, including joint working, international comparisons and benchmarking, provision of learning and knowledge, and mobility opportunities to both students and academic and administrative staff.
- The implementation of JPs (and particularly Joint Degrees JD) continue to face some challenges, coming from different regulatory frameworks and legislation, including a diversity or ambiguity of terminology, a lack of information on good practices and trust on specific implementation as-

pects, and differences in teaching and student assessment in different countries.

- For academically well-integrated JPs, the main challenges are largely the administrative and technical hurdles that currently make implementation and national recognition of JP/JDs difficult. These can discourage universities from entering into the development and implementation of transnational JPs.
- In spite of such challenges, however, JP/JD are now a reality, are growing in number, and have been demonstrably successful for HEIs, their students and stakeholders.

Conclusion

The reality of successful implementation of transnational JPs should be made clearer and more transparent at national and European levels.

There is a clear need for provision of precise and comparable information, (data + context) on the number and characteristics of JPs.

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On the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes:

- Given that most countries still have national requirements in force before an administrative decision on the outcome of the evaluation of a JP can be achieved, there is a need to find a means to facilitate a single evaluation procedure and principles for mutual acceptance of the decision.
- Some countries exempt Erasmus Mundus Masters programmes from the need to undergo national accreditation systems. Whilst this was proposed as a possible model for wider development, it was also noted that the Erasmus Mundus selection procedure itself does not equate to an external QA process in line with the requirements of the ESG.
- The principle of single accreditation and multiple recognition, implemented for instance in the MULTRA project

provides a proved way on how to go on to implement the single evaluation of Joint Programmes leading to multiple accreditation. The procedure is however based on extensive and detailed collaborations between specific QA agencies, and a more generic approach, applicable across the EHEA and beyond and irrespective of the evaluation outcome, is needed.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for a single evaluation procedure for JPs that leads to an internationally-recognised outcome within and beyond the EHEA. In addition to the European Approach, the ECA MULTRA project has shown that such an approach is possible at programme accreditation level, but a more-widely applicable methodology encompassing all forms of QA within the EHEA, and its partners, is required.

On the European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint programmes

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- The establishment of the European Approach provides a generic approach to the QA of JPs.
- Work on implementation of the European Approach needs to be continued, without always waiting for a 'European blueprint', at each level, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and ministries
- Ministries should take all the necessary steps to facilitate and allow the application of the European Approach, perhaps by allowing exceptions / exemptions to regular compulsory external quality assurance procedures (e.g. national / QA agency general initiatives such as those of the German Accreditation Council and NVAO, specific initiatives such the 'automatic' accreditation of Erasmus Mundus programmes, agreement between Quality Agencies, etc.).

- Ministries should additionally take all necessary steps to ensure that students and graduates from transnational JP are not discriminated against with respect to students and graduates from regular programmes.
- Quality assurance agencies should identify, in their guidelines and protocols, differences between the European Approach and their regular national procedures. These differences should be made transparent to all the HEIs.
- Quality assurance agencies should specifically include in their external evaluation/assessment/accreditation procedures of JPs, criteria that address the ‘jointness’ of the programme, in cases where the European Approach is not implemented.
- National regulations concerning JP/JDs should be checked against the bases of the European Approach, to develop an enabling framework that fosters and supports JP/JD and guarantees the quality and transparency of JP/JDs.

Conclusion

The European Approach for the QA of Joint Programmes can provide a methodology that is widely applicable, that excludes the need for specific national criteria, and can encompass all forms of QA within the EHEA, and its partners beyond.

Implementation of the European Approach will (however) require coordinated actions by ministries, quality assurance agencies and HEIs at legal, administrative and pedagogical levels.

On the Recognition of evaluation decisions concerning Joint programmes

- There is no single model within the EHEA for the relationship between evaluation and recognition of evaluation outcomes, whether at programme and/or institutional levels. Implementation of the European Approach will require attention to the different (national) models.

- The MULTRA project provides a proven, though rather specific, way towards implementation of a single evaluation (for a Joint Programme) leading to an outcome with multiple recognitions (of that evaluation outcome).
- Generic agreements between national quality assurance agencies, to mutually recognize evaluation processes made by any EQAR-registered agency and their outcomes, will be needed as a means of overcoming current hurdles to the development of JPs and their QA/recognition.

On the Recognition of degrees from Joint programmes

- Beyond the specific case of JPs, recognition of joint and dual/multiple degrees should be considered an essential policy issue, rather than a purely technical one.
- There is a need to consider transnational JP/JDs as something other than a pure national issue even when national qualifications are awarded.

On Terminology

- There are currently various, different descriptions and legal definitions of Joint Programmes within the EHEA.

Conclusion:

It is proposed that the definition for a JP given in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes could be used as the basis for the provision of precise and comparable information (data + context) on the number and characteristics of JPs.

Such an agreed, legally-binding EHEA definition will be required where the European Approach is incorporated into national regulations, to ensure straightforward coordination of the recognition of both evaluation outcomes and the degrees awarded by Joint Programmes.

General conclusion

Through Joint Programmes and Joint Degrees, we can see an expression of the “Bologna paradox”. JP/JDs are, per se, transnational programmes and qualifications but developed, implemented, managed, quality assured and recognized within different national/regional contexts.

Recognizing the ‘uniqueness’ of JP/JDs, this paradox should push ministries (and other stakeholders) support the implementation of the European Approach by implementation of an ‘enabling framework’ in terms of programme structure, quality assurance, qualifications framework(s), recognition, etc. Under such an agreed framework, JP/JDs could then be considered as ‘exceptions to the national rules’.

