



AQU CATALUNYA

CONDITIONS FOR THE RECOGNITION BY AQU CATALUNYA OF JOINT PROGRAMMES ACCREDITATIONS USING THE EUROPEAN APPROACH FRAMEWORK

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The Spanish Ministry of Universities establishes mandatory *ex-ante* and *ex-post* **accreditation processes** for the delivery of higher education study programmes that can be recognised throughout the European Higher Education Area.¹ For this reason, joint programmes must meet the minimum requirements of the Spanish authorities in order to be recognised as official degrees.

The aim of this document is to establish the conditions under which non-Catalan universities that coordinate joint programmes must meet in order to be automatically recognised by AQU Catalunya in its accreditations processes. This document also includes the conditions that, under the European Approach framework, must meet the external reviews carried out by EQAR-registered agencies.

A. Application

The European Approach is the pertinent instrument to be applied when Catalan universities cooperate with other European higher education institutions (HEI) in joint programmes and programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory in order to be recognised in Spain.

AQU Catalunya can only recognise assessments carried out using the European Approach by EQAR-registered agencies.²

When Catalan universities cooperate with other HEI outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) European Approach may also be used for joint programmes. In this case, an agreement between AQU and other agencies carrying out the assessments must be signed to be recognised by AQU.

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¹ Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university degree programmes and the quality assurance process thereof. [Retrieved April 2022]

² EQAR-registered agencies

B. Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

B.1 Ex-ante accreditations

The evaluations carried out by other EQAR-registered agencies should take into account the following dimensions in order to be able to recognise study programmes in Spain:

1 Description, aims, objectives and programme justification

HEIs that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries to ensure that the degree(s) belong to their higher education degree systems. The institutions must be included in the Spanish registry of universities when the Catalan university applies for the accreditation.³

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues: denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme; coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved; admission and selection procedures for students; mobility of students and teachers; examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

The joint programme must specify its aims, its intended learning outcomes and justification of its academic, scientific, professional and social interest.

These dimensions coincide with those proposed by the EA standard 1 “**Eligibility**”.

2 Results of the teaching and learning process

HEIs shall state what a student must know, understand or be able to do at the end of the period of learning and how that learning will be demonstrated, i.e., the intended learning outcomes (LO). The LO must be assessable and in accordance with the specifications of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The intended learning outcomes shall comprise knowledge, skills and competencies in the respective field(s) of knowledge.

When a study programme leads to a regulated profession in Spain, the learning outcomes established by the Spanish Government must be taken into account.

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³ Registro de Universidades, Centros y Títulos

This dimension is equivalent to EA standard 2 “**Learning Outcomes**”.

3 Admission, recognition and mobility

HEIs must specify the criteria for student admission and state whether foundation courses are required. Said requirements and criteria must be appropriate in light of the programme level and knowledge field.

The transfer and recognition of qualifications and periods of study programmes quantified in ECTS credits (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

HEIs must describe the procedures for organising the mobility of students and teachers.

These aspects are included in EA standard 4 “**Admission and Recognition**”.

4 Planning of teaching

The structure and content of the curriculum should be organised to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The subject workload must be quantified in ECTS credits, which can be either compulsory or elective; and they may be delivered annually, biannually, termly or even weekly. The syllabus for each year or subject must include the aims and intended learning outcomes.

The learning and teaching approaches to be applied should be adequate to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The diversity of students should be respected and their needs should be met, especially in view of their potentially different cultural backgrounds.

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should be aligned with the intended LO. They should be applied consistently among cooperating institutions.

This dimension is included in EA standard 2 “**Learning Outcomes**”, standard 3 “**Study Programme**” and, 5 “**Learning, Teaching and Assessment**”.

5 Academic and teaching support staff

Staff involved in teaching must be both sufficient and suitable in accord with the characteristics of the programme and the number of students. HEIs must provide a description of the teaching staff (qualifications, professional experience, etc.) and other human resources necessary for the study programme delivery.

This dimension is included in EA standard 7.1 “**Resources: staff**”.

6 Resources for learning: materials and infrastructure, practices and services

HEIs must justify that the material resources and services available and, where appropriate, arranged with other institutions outside the university (support and guidance systems for students, spaces, facilities, laboratories, scientific, technical or artistic equipment, libraries and reading rooms, new technologies, etc.) are adequate to guarantee the achievement of the learning outcomes and the development of planned training activities, adhering to the criteria of universal access and design.

This dimension is included in EA standard 7.2 **“Resources: facilities”** and 6 **“Student Support”**.

7 Internal Quality Assurance System

Cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.

Relevant information about the programme, such as admission requirements and procedures, programme catalogue, examination and assessment procedures, etc., should be well documented and published by taking into account specific student mobility needs.

This dimension is included in EA standard 8 **“Transparency and Documentation”** and 9 **“Quality Assurance”**.

B.2 *Ex-post* accreditations

1 Quality of the study programme

The programme’s design (intended learning outcomes and structure of the curriculum) is up to date according to the requirements of the field of knowledge and it is aligned with the corresponding level in the EQF. The first-year student profile is in keeping with the expected profile and the number of students is consistent with intake. The teaching coordination mechanisms are effective. Moreover, the joint programme meets current legal regulations.

This dimension is included in EA standard 1.3 **“Eligibility: Cooperation Agreement”**, 2 **“Learning Outcomes”**, 3 **“Study Programme”** and 4 **“Admission and Recognition”**.

2 Relevance of the public information

The HEIs publish truthful, complete, up-to-date and accessible information on the characteristics of the degree programme and its delivery. It publishes information on the academic and satisfaction outcomes as well as its internal quality assurance system (IQAS) together with its relevant documentation, especially, accreditation and monitoring reports.

This dimension is included in EA standard 8 **“Transparency and Documentation”**.

3 Efficacy of the programme’s internal quality assurance system

The implemented IQAS has processes which ensure the design, approval, monitoring and accreditation of the study programme. It ensures the collection of information and outcomes for an efficient management, especially academic and satisfaction outcomes. The IQAS is periodically reviewed and generates an enhancement plan that is used for its continuous improvement.

This dimension is included in EA standard 9 **“Quality Assurance”**.

4 Suitability of teaching staff for the study programme

The teaching staff meets the pertinent qualifications for programme delivery and has sufficient teaching, research and, where applicable, professional experience. There is enough teaching staff and its assignment to courses is adequate. The HEIs offer support and opportunities for enhancing teaching quality.

This dimension is included in EA points 7.1 **“Resources: staff”**.

5 Effectiveness of learning support systems

The student orientation services should provide adequate support and contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Professional/career orientation services should facilitate labour market entry.

The available facilities are adequate for the number of students and the characteristics of the programme.

This dimension is included in EA points 6 **“Student support”** and 7.2 **“Resources: facilities”**.

6 Quality of programme learning outcomes

Learning and assessment activities are consistent with the programme’s competence profile. The outcomes of these processes are adequate in terms of both academic achievements (in line with Qualifications Framework) and the academic and employment indicators.

This dimension is equivalent to EA point 2 **“Learning Outcomes”**, 5 **“Learning, Teaching and Assessment”**.

AQU and European Approach procedures comparison

The following table compares AQU assessment procedures with those included in the European Approach protocol.

European Approach	AQU <i>ex-ante</i> Accreditation	AQU <i>ex-post</i> Accreditation
1. Eligibility	1. Description, aims, objectives and programme justification	1. Quality of the study programme
2. Learning Outcomes	2. Results of the teaching and learning process	1. Quality of the study programme 6. Quality of programme learning outcomes
4. Admission and Recognition	3. Admission, recognition and mobility	1. Quality of the study programme
2. Learning Outcomes 3. Study Programme 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment	4. Planning of teaching	1. Quality of the study programme
7.1. Resources: staff	5. Academic and teaching support staff	4. Suitability of teaching staff for the study programme
6. Student support 7.2 Resources: facilities	6. Resources for learning: materials and infrastructure, practices and services	5. Effectiveness of learning support systems
8. Transparency and Documentation 9. Quality assurance	8. Internal Quality Assurance System	2. Relevance of the public information 3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system
2. Learning Outcomes 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment	—	6. Quality of programme learning outcomes

C. Procedure for External Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Ex-ante and ex-post accreditations

1 Self-assessment report or study programme proposal document

Ex-ante accreditation: HEI cooperating in the joint programme must elaborate a proposal with all the information needed for the ex-ante accreditation by the selected EQAR-registered agency. The HEI must ensure that it incorporates, at least, the aspects listed in the table above.

Ex-post accreditation: The SER should contain comprehensive information that demonstrates the compliance of the joint programme with the standards stated in section B.2. The self-assessment report should focus explicitly on the distinctive feature of the joint programme as a joint endeavour of higher education institutions from more than one national higher education system. It should also provide the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that foreign agencies and experts might need in order to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems.

2 Application

The institution that coordinates the joint programme must formally request accreditation from its agency following the procedures established in its country.

3 External review panel

The EQAR-registered agency should appoint a panel of at least five members. The panel should combine expertise in the relevant subject(s) or discipline(s), including the labour market/world of work in the relevant field(s), expertise in quality assurance in higher education and one student. Panel members' independence must be ensured.

The panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme. One Catalan or Spanish panel member is highly recommended when the joint programme has to be recognised by the Spanish authorities.

The agency should brief the experts on the review activity, their specific role and the specifics of the quality assurance procedure especially those regarding joint programmes.

4 Site Visit

Ex-ante accreditation: external review panel should meet with the group in charge of the new joint programme in order to discuss its characteristics based on the proposal document and to solve any issue arisen from the documentation analysis.

Ex-post accreditation: The site visit should enable the review panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and assess whether the programme complies with the Standards (part B.2). The site visit should therefore include discussions with representatives of all cooperating HEI and in particular the management of the institutions and the programme, the staff, the students, and other relevant stakeholders, such as alumni and the professional field. Although the site visit should normally be restricted to one location, videoconferencing tools may be used to take into account the provision at all locations.

5 Review Report

The review panel should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the standards (part B). The report should also contain recommendations for developing the joint programme further. The review panel must make a recommendation for the final decision.

The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The HEI must have the opportunity to comment on a draft version of the review report and request correction of factual errors.

6 Formal Outcomes and Decision

The EQAR-registered agency should take a decision based on the review report and the recommendation for the decision, considering the comments by the HEI as appropriate. In order to recognise the joint programme in Spain, the agency must grant or deny the accreditation (with or without conditions), based on the standards (part B). The agency may supplement the formal outcome and the accreditation decision by recommendations.

The agency should give reasons for its accreditation decision. This applies in particular for accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions and for cases where the decision differs from the review panel's conclusions and recommendation for the decision.

7 Appeals

The institutions should have the right to appeal against a formal outcome or an accreditation decision. Therefore, the agency should have a formalised appeals procedure in place.

8 Result communication

Once the process is completed, the agency should publish the review report and, if applicable, the formal outcome or the accreditation decision on its website. The report should be sent to AQU Catalunya in order to be taken into account in the Spanish study programme recognition process.