



AQU CATALUNYA

# GUIDE TO EX-ANTE ACCREDITATION OF JOINT PROGRAMMES USING THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

This document forms the basis for ex-ante accreditation (verification) of joint programmes following the framework of the European Approach. The guide is intended for both the external committees and commissions and the study programmes in their process of proposal-making.





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© Author: [Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, 2022](#)  
C. d'Enric Granados, 33  
08007 Barcelona

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Editorial team: Josep Manel Torres, Martí Casadesús Fa

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# Table of contents

<b>GUIDE TO EX-ANTE ACCREDITATION OF JOINT PROGRAMMES USING THE EUROPEAN APPROACH .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION, AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAMME JUSTIFICATION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>RESULTS OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>ADMISSION, RECOGNITION AND MOBILITY .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>PLANNING OF TEACHING .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>ACADEMIC AND TEACHING SUPPORT STAFF.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>RESOURCES FOR LEARNING: MATERIALS AND INFRASTRUCTURE, PRACTICES AND SERVICES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM .....</b>	<b>19</b>



# Introduction

**The European Approach is the pertinent instrument to be applied whenever Catalan universities cooperate with other European higher education institutions (HEIs) on joint programmes and programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory in order to be recognised in Spain and by other European authorities and quality assurance agencies.**

The [European Approach](#) for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was adopted by European ministers responsible for higher education and was developed to facilitate external quality assurance of these programmes. It defines standards that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria. This is expected to facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes, which genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

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

The ex-ante accreditation standards implemented by AQU Catalunya are fully aligned with those corresponding to the European Approach. Degrees that undergo ex-ante accreditation must demonstrate that they exceed the standards corresponding to the following dimensions:

- A. Description, aims, objectives and programme justification
- B. Results of the teaching and learning process
- C. Admission, recognition and mobility
- D. Planning of teaching
- E. Academic and teaching support staff
- F. Resources for learning: materials and infrastructure, practices and services
- G. Internal Quality Assurance System

The methodology and standards established by AQU Catalunya fully correspond to those of the European Approach. In each dimension, the correspondence with the European Approach standards is indicated. The standards corresponding to the justification of the

relevance of the qualification and the expected outcomes are not present in the European Approach and are introduced, as stated above, because they are legal requirements in Spain.



# Description, aims, objectives and programme justification

**The name, aims and objectives of the degree relate to its content, are consistent with its field of knowledge and with the corresponding level in the Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework.**

**The name respects current regulations and does not give rise to errors concerning its academic effects or to confusions concerning its content and professional outcome.**

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 lecturers; examination regulations; student assessment methods; recognition of credits; and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

The study programme must state its aims and education objectives clearly and appropriately. The approach or focus of the degree should be established (academic, specialist, professional, research, introductory research, etc.).

The proposal must:

- > Provide the programme name and type.
- > Identify the applicant university and the HEI(s) responsible for the studies leading to the Bachelor's or Master's degree.
- > Provide the degree duration both in years and in ECTS credits.
- > Specify the expected number of incoming students in each academic year.
- > Indicate the main characteristics of the teaching offered, such as the modality (in-person, distance education or blended learning), the teaching periods and the main language of instruction.
- > Specify the aims and learning objectives.
- > Include a justification of its academic, scientific, professional and social interest.
- > Define the programme ordinances and other regulations applying to students.

**Correspondence to European Approach standards**

- > Standard 1 "Eligibility"

### Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > Cooperation agreement
- > Degree programme regulations

### Assessment

- > Coherence of the programme name with its aims and objectives, content, knowledge field and level
- > Recognition of the institutions proposing the joint programme as official HEIs in their respective countries
- > Completeness of the cooperation agreement and adaptation to the educational level and characteristics of the joint programme proposal
- > If applicable, adherence to academic regulations

# Results of the teaching and learning process

**The intended learning outcomes correspond to those established by the MECES for the educational level of the degree.**

The intended learning outcomes (LO) expressed in knowledge, skills and competences (KSC) has to be relevant within the disciplinary field. The intended learning outcomes must correspond to those established nationally and internationally for similar study programmes. Moreover, the learning outcomes must correspond to the training level of the proposal in accordance with the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Catalonia, the corresponding Spanish framework (MECES) and the European Qualifications Framework. For study programmes that enable access to the practice of a regulated professional activity in Spain, the KSCs must also comply with those established in the official provisions.

## Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 2 “Learning Outcomes”

## Evidence

- > Degree programme report

## Assessment

- > Alignment with the disciplinary scope and educational level of the degree
- > Clarity in the wording and relevance of the structure

# Admission, recognition and mobility

**The process for the admission of students to the degree is fair, reliable, equitable and public. The mechanisms available in the study programme allow for credit transfer and prior learning recognition. Mechanisms for student and teacher mobility are adequate.**

In establishing the entry profile, the proposal must include the characteristics of the newly admitted students which must ensure the acquisition of learning outcomes in the expected time. Those characteristics must be clearly identifiable, i.e., entrance qualification requirements, minimum academic requirements in other subjects, language proficiency, etc. Also, the access process must be designed in accordance with the regulations when applicable. The HEI must define the admission body and its composition must be appropriate.

Foundation courses, when necessary, must be clearly described (type of students, credits, whether they are part of the Master's degree or not) and must be appropriate in relation to disciplines and the intended learning outcomes. It is also necessary to indicate when they should be taken and passed.

The criteria and regulations for credit transfer and prior learning recognition must be clear and in accordance with regulations. The recognition process must follow the "[Lisbon Convention](#)". The body or unit involved, the criteria and the processes for recognition must be described.

Student and teacher mobility actions must be described. They must be planned adequately, and monitoring and assessment mechanisms must be in place. These mobility actions must be consistent with the general objectives of the study programme.

## Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 4 "Admission and Recognition"

## Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > Links to access regulations and academic guidance
- > Links to transfer and prior learning recognition regulations
- > Links to student and teacher mobility mechanisms

### Assessment

- > Admission criteria adequacy, suitability and clarity
- > Compliance with the Lisbon Convention and legal regulations
- > Relevance to allow intended learning outcome achievement
- > Relevance of the mechanisms and criteria for the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer
- > Adequacy of the mechanisms for student and teacher mobility

# Planning of teaching

**The curriculum responds appropriately to the aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the degree. The implementation of the curriculum in terms of timing, assignment of ECTS credits to subjects, and teaching assignment is relevant and appropriate.**

**The training programme encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. This approach is reflected in the teaching methodology and activities, and in the assessment of students.**

The HEI must at least specify the curriculum structure, syllabus, teaching and learning activities, examinations and academic terms. As for the subjects or modules, the institution must provide the syllabus with information on content, intended learning outcomes, ECTS credits, subject type (compulsory, optional, internship, degree project, etc.), academic term and language of tuition.

For each of the subjects, it is necessary to indicate how the learning outcomes are related to the teaching methods and the training and examination activities in order to achieve the general objectives and the competence profile of the degree. In addition, the gender perspective must be present both in the definition of learning outcomes and in the design of both teaching and examination activities.

The way in which the coordination of the teaching and learning processes and their supervision will be carried out must be made explicit. It is necessary to describe the body or bodies in charge.

When work placements are present in the curriculum, the HEI must provide information about the ECTS value, cooperating external institutions, intended learning outcomes, functions to be performed, student supervision and examination methods. Work placements must benefit from adequate management and supervision to allow students to carry out tasks that are typical of the professional field in accordance with the general objectives of the degree.

The final-year project constitutes one of the “key assignments” that shows the level of training acquired in the study programme. The final-year project has to be oriented to the performance of research, an intervention or an innovation in the professional field. Students have to integrate and apply —with professional, creative and innovative criteria— the KSC acquired throughout the degree and incorporate new ones, specifically related to the final-year project (autonomy, initiative, implementation and development of knowledge, skills and strategies previously acquired).

### Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 2 “Learning Outcomes”
- > Standard 3 “Study Programme”
- > Standard 5 “Learning, Teaching and Assessment”

### Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > The HEI’s internal regulations
- > Final-year project guidelines

### Assessment

- > Correspondence and adaptation of the structure and content of the subjects with the discipline and the level of the degree
- > Consistency with expected learning outcomes
- > Adequacy of the structure of the curriculum to deliver all the planned teaching and learning activities
- > Relevance of the final-year project and work placement proposals

# Academic and teaching support staff

**The academic credentials of the teaching staff are adequate to deliver the teaching in the training programme.**

**Teachers have the necessary accreditation established by the regulations.**

**The assigned teaching staff is sufficient to deal with the delivery of the degree.**

Teaching staff and teaching support staff must be sufficient and adequate, depending on the characteristics of the degree and the number of students. Therefore, they must have experience and qualifications appropriate to the objectives of the degree, and be sufficient in terms of the numbers and time dedicated to cover the main academic tasks: teaching and examination activities, student guidance and supervision, management activities, etc.

The HEI must include the list of the academic staff involved together with their characteristics: qualifications; accreditations; categories; teaching, research or professional experience; dedication and specialist area.

## Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 7.1 “Resources: Staff”

## Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > Link to teaching staff curricula vitae
- > Consortium agreement on academic and teaching support staff

## Assessment

- > Academic staff relevance
- > Academic and teaching support staff sufficiency



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

**The material resources available are appropriate for the number of students, the characteristics of the degree and the education model.**

**The available teaching and learning support infrastructure appropriately meets the learning needs of students.**

The HEI must provide information on the spaces and services necessary for the delivery of the study programme. They must be sufficient in relation to the students enrolled.

The HEI must also provide information on:

- > Special infrastructure for the performance of certain training activities, such as group work rooms, study rooms, laboratories, etc.
- > Libraries and other online documentation resources
- > Technological infrastructure and learning management systems, etc.
- > Other services available to students and academic staff to achieve the objectives of the curriculum (guidance services, self-learning services, psychological guidance, etc.)

These resources and services available to students must incorporate the gender perspective.

## Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 6 “Student Support”.
- > Standard 7.2 “Resources: Facilities”

## Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > Links to student guidance and support services
- > Agreements with external institutions for work placements

## Assessment

- > Adequacy of academic facilities and services to the educational objectives of the degree

- > Sufficiency of academic facilities and services for the performance of teaching and learning activities
- > Adequacy of actions for support and guidance to students

# Internal Quality Assurance System

**The chain of responsibilities is well established and effective, and key stakeholders can be involved in decision-making.**

**The study programme adequately informs all stakeholders about the characteristics of the training programme.**

**The study programme is reviewed and improved periodically. The outcome of the review is detailed in an improvement plan that is kept up to date.**

**Planned actions are communicated to all stakeholders.**

The cooperating institutions must apply a joint internal quality assurance system that has to include, at least, procedures:

- > For assessing and improving the quality of teaching and teaching staff.
- > For guaranteeing the quality of work placements and mobility programmes.
- > For analysing the job placement of graduates.
- > For analysing satisfaction of the principal stakeholders (students, academic and administration staff, etc.) with the study programme.
- > For the analysis of suggestions or complaints.
- > For placing degree delivery on hold when necessary.

## Correspondence to European Approach standards

- > Standard 8 “Transparency and Documentation”
- > Standard 9 “Quality Assurance”

## Evidence

- > Degree programme report
- > Link to detailed quality assurance system
- > Link to the public web page of the study programme, if already published

## Assessment

- > Relevance of the procedures described to ensure the evaluation and continuous improvement of the degree
- > Relevance of the public information

Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya

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