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 *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.[1] For this reason, joint programs must meet the minimum requirements of the Spanish authorities in order to be recognized 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 recognized 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.

AQU will **maintain close collaboration** with the universities of the consortium and with the agency in charge of the evaluation **to facilitate the recognition process** as much as possible.

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 other to be able to recognise study programmes in Spain:

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[1] Real Decreto 1393/2007, de 29 de octubre, por el que se establece la ordenación de las enseñanzas universitarias oficiales. Available at https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2007/10/29/1393/con [Accessed April 2020]
[2] EQAR-registered agencies: https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/

1 Program description

The HEIs that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based. 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.

These dimensions coincide with those proposed by the EA standard 1 **«Eligibility»** .

2 Justification

The HEIs must justify the proposed study programme, arguing its academic, scientific or professional interest. External referents should be included to support the adequacy of the proposal to national or international criteria for degrees with similar academic characteristics. Finally, a description of the internal and external consultation procedures used to build the study programme must be described.

There is not any equivalent dimension in EA so the **HEIs may include a justification section to the application** .

3 Knowledge, skills and competences

HEIs must state the general and specific competences that students must acquire during their studies, and that are required to grant the title. The proposed competences must be evaluable. Those competencies must agree with the specifications of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). When a study program leads to a regulated profession in Spain the competences stablished by the Government must be taken into account.

This dimension is equivalent to EA standard 2 **«Learning outcomes»** .

4 Student admission and selection

HEIs must provide accessible information prior to enrolment and first-year student orientation to introduce students to both the academic and social aspects of the HEI as they transition from high school. Likewise, HEI must state the criteria for student admission and weather foundation courses are required.

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Transfer and recognition of qualifications and periods of studies quantified in ECTS (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

These aspects are included in EA standard 4 **«Admission and Recognition».**

Support and guidance systems for students once enrolled must also be explained. The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account students with special educational needs and students in mobility programmes.

This aspect is included in EA point 6 **«Student Support».**

5 Study Programme

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Course workload must be quantified in ECTS, they can be mandatory or optional and be delivered annually, biannually, quarterly or even weekly. The syllabus of the courses or subjects must include the intended learning outcomes.

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

6 Academic 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».**

7 Material resources and services

HEIs must justify that material means and services available and, where appropriate, arranged with other institutions outside the university, (spaces, facilities, laboratories, scientific, technical or artistic equipment, library and reading rooms, new technologies, etc.), are adequate to guarantee the acquisition of competences and the development of planned training activities, observing the criteria of universal accessibility and design for all.

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

8 Expected results

An estimation of the most relevant performance indicators should be provided (graduation, dropout and efficiency rates) as well as a general procedure to assess the progress and learning results of students.

There is not any equivalent dimension in EA so the HEIs may include an expected results section to the application.

9 Quality assurance system

The cooperating institutions must apply a joint internal quality assurance system that has to include, at least, procedures for a) evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and teaching

staff; b) to guarantee the quality of external internships and mobility programs; c) for analysing the job placement of graduates; d) for analysing satisfaction of the different groups involved (students, academic and administration staff and services, etc.) with study programme; e) for the analysis of suggestions or complaints; and f) for degree extinction when necessary

This dimension is included in EA standard 9 **«Quality Assurance».**

B.2 *Ex-post* accreditations

1   Quality of the study programme

The programme's design (competence profile and structure of the curriculum) is up to date according to the requirements of the discipline and it is aligned with the corresponding level in the EQF. The first-year students' profile is in agreement with the expected one and its number is consistent with the number of places offered. The teaching coordination mechanisms are effective. The current legal regulations are met.

This dimension is included in EA standard 1.3 **«Eligibility: Cooperation agreement», «Study Programme»**, 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 programmes. 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. Aspects and/or dimensions not present in EA are bold red marked.

European Approach	AQU *ex-ante* Accreditation	AQU *ex-post* Accreditation
1 Eligibility	1 Program description	—
—	**2 Justification**	—
2 Learning Outcomes	3 Knowledge, skills and competences	1 Quality of the study programme 6 Quality of programme learning outcomes
4 Admission and Recognition 6 Student Support	4 Student admission and selection	1 Quality of the study programme
2 Learning Outcomes 3 Study Programme 5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment	5 Study Programme	1 Quality of the study programme
7.1 Resources: staff	6 Academic Staff	4 Suitability of teaching staff for the study programme
6 Student support 7.2 Resources: facilities	7 Material resources and services	5 Effectiveness of learning support systems
—	**8 Expected results**	—
9 Quality assurance	9 Quality assurance system	3 Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system
8 Transparency and Documentation	—	2 Relevance of the public information
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 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 recognise 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 the 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 recognize 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.