



EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL
DEPARTMENT

IMPLEMENTING THE EUROPEAN APPROACH FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES

SUPPORT GUIDE

2023



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1. ABOUT HCÉRES

1.1 HCÉRES IN BRIEF

Hcéres is the French public agency responsible for the periodic evaluation of all state-contracted higher education and research institutions in France, their study programmes (bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate-level) and their research units. It also evaluates research bodies and clusters of institutions.

Performing several thousand evaluations throughout France every 5 years (310 institutions, 5,700 study programmes, 2,800 research units, 25 clusters of institutions) according to a robust methodology defined in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), Hcéres capitalises on French experience by putting it to good use internationally.

1.2 INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF HCÉRES

Hcéres complies with the aforementioned ESG. It is a **member of ENQA** (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and is **registered on EQAR** (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education).

Hcéres proposes a wide variety of international services:

- Evaluation and accreditation of foreign programmes and HEIs;
- Evaluation and accreditation of foreign research units and bodies;
- Evaluation of joint diploma;
- Technical assistance and development of quality assurance policies;
- International partnerships.

Relying on its extensive network of academic, professional, student and administrative experts, it meets the needs of international higher education stakeholders by adapting to their local contexts and requirements.

1.3 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

« Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area¹ (EHEA) ». **As an EQAR-registered agency, Hcéres plays a key role in the implementation** of the *European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes*.

Background of the European Approach

In the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012), ministers of the EHEA agreed on the following: "We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes. (...) We encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach. We will 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."

The Bologna Follow-Up Group, which is the working group of the EHEA countries, consequently included in its work programme 2013-2015 the task to: "Develop a policy proposal for a specific European accreditation approach for joint programmes, which should be applied to all those joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level." **The European Approach was then approved by EHEA ministers at their conference in Yerevan, May 2015.**

Role of the Hcéres in implementing the European Approach

Upon request of French or foreign HEIs, Hcéres has a full expertise to apply the European Approach. By doing, our agency:

- Select and train relevant experts to carry out the evaluation based on the standards of the European Approach;
- Inform the counterpart agencies and other HEIs interested in the process that it will coordinate an evaluation based on the European Approach and cooperate with them if needed;
- Contribute to the acceptance of the output of the evaluation to the other countries.

¹ https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmesv1_0-2015.pdf

In conclusion, the aim of such a European Approach evaluation is:

- To ease the external quality assurance process of the joint degree (evaluation is performed by only one agency);
- To provide an evaluation based on jointness criteria and internationally recognised experts in order to help the consortium improve the quality of its joint programme.

2. DETAILED PROCEDURE

The overall process of an evaluation based on the European Approach lasts **on average 9 months** from the signature of the agreement and the finalisation of the external evaluation report.

2.1 APPOINTMENT OF PERMANENT CONTACTS

Throughout the duration of the evaluation procedure, **Hcéres will appoint a permanent contact person** who will be responsible for answering any questions that the institution or the consortium may have concerning the methodology and procedures.

The alliance will also appoint a permanent representative who is involved in the joint programme to be the contact point with the Hcéres representative.

2.2 SELF-EVALUATION

Self-evaluation is part of the internal quality assurance system of the institutions. It provides the evaluated entity with an opportunity to carry out a critical and sincere consideration of its activities with the help of external criteria.

For each study programme, the self-evaluation called for must be directed by the bodies responsible for managing the programme based on the standards and guidelines of the European Approach (see appendix 1). This will prove to be a useful exercise for measuring strengths and weaknesses and recommending improvements to the programme. Finally, it will also help with the management of the institution's overall range of study programmes.

Ultimately, this will enable the institution and the teaching team to benefit from the self-evaluation. It should be considered as a learning process for the benefit of the entire community.

The practical aspects of the self-evaluation depend on the institution itself and are completely flexible (period of self-evaluation, composition of working groups, methods of presenting results, etc.). The self-evaluation report should include as many of the relevant people or bodies as possible (management, teachers, non-teaching staff, students, external partners, etc.). The report must be prepared jointly by the partners involved in the study programme.

The main goals of the self-evaluation are as follows:

1. Perform a self-critical review of the services provided by the programme, including a SWOT analysis;
2. Provide a solid basis for external evaluation;
3. Initiate a quality improvement process by creating innovation dynamics.

The self-evaluation report (SER) is the basis for the evaluation process. It must compile all the information required for the external evaluation carried out by independent experts. **The SER follows the standards as detailed in appendix 1). For each standard, the SER must demonstrate how and to what extent the programme considers that it meets the requirements.**

It will be between **20 and 30 pages long (excluding appendices)** and must cover the entire study programme to be evaluated. For a better understanding of the programme, the following can be added:

1. A detailed identification sheet of the study programme providing specific details about the programme and its environment (see appendix 1);
2. Some appendices (For examples, see appendix 3).

2.3 EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND EVALUATION PANEL

Hcéres external quality assurance is based on the principle of peer review conducted in a collegial and transparent manner. Hcéres will set up a panel of **4 experts (2 academics, 1 student and 1 representative of the socioeconomic sector) from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme.**

The panel of experts will be selected in line with the ESG and with specific national requirements regarding expert profile. **The names of the experts shall be submitted to the institution for opinion in order to avoid any conflicts of interest.** The alliance also has the opportunity to provide a short list of candidates for the panel, in accordance with the above – mentioned criteria. The proposal includes CVs and descriptions of the experience in quality assurance. They shall therefore be chosen carefully, have the required aptitudes and skills, and have been appropriately trained or briefed. **Hcéres ensures the training of the experts prior to the evaluation.**

If the evaluation request requires that two or more agencies work together, the experts must obviously be approved by all the agencies. However, one of the agencies shall be the “coordinating agency”. It is thus the responsibility of the “coordinating agency” to select and appoint the panel members. The list of selected experts will be submitted to the alliance to check and prevent any conflicts of interest.

Before carrying out their online visit, the experts must first work off the self-evaluation report submitted. However, they may request additional documents when necessary. The institution shall respond to such requests as soon as possible using the most appropriate methods.

2.4 ONLINE VISIT

The online visit must be carried out in line with Hcéres recommendations. A qualified representative appointed by the institution shall facilitate the whole visit which shall take place over **2-3 half days**, depending on the time differences between countries.

The online visit will include interviews with the people responsible for the design of the study programme, along with representatives of students, teaching staff, and administrative and technical staff of the various campuses where the programme is taught, and the main partners (professionals, scientists, etc.) working at the institution or that employ former students directly after graduation. However, online interviews may be conducted when they cannot be present due to distance.

It is important that the various stakeholders of the evaluated entity be heard individually, without the presence of their supervising body. The Hcéres project team will examine the draft agenda for the online visit with this in mind and may ask the evaluated entity to make changes accordingly.

There will be no official post-evaluation meeting with the management of the joint programme after the visit. However, a final meeting between the experts and management team of the programme will provide an opportunity to ask any remaining questions, request further details and thank the participants. The evaluated entity may also provide any final information. During the meeting, the deadlines for the report writing phase will be reiterated.

2.5 EVALUATION REPORT

Following the online visit, the chair of the panel of experts will submit to Hcéres an evaluation report which will summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the joint programme and recommendations for the evaluated entity.

Once reviewed by Hcéres, this provisional report will be sent to the alliance for comment, thereby beginning the response phase. The chair of the panel of experts, together with the experts and project team will examine the comments from the institution (only factual errors will be taken into account) in order to produce the final evaluation report.

This final report will be considered the official document of reference and be **published on the Hcéres and EQAR websites at the end of the process.**

2.6 SEEKING ACCREDITATION OF THE JOINT PROGRAMME

Hcéres will only carry out the evaluation process according to the European Approach described in this document. **If the consortium wishes to accredit its joint programme, each of its partners needs to send the evaluation report produced by Hcéres to its national accreditation body** (Minister or accreditation agency).

APPENDIX 1: AGREED STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA²

1. Eligibility

1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

1.2 Joint design and delivery

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

1.3 Cooperation Agreement

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 regarding management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.);
- 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.

2. Learning Outcomes

2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

2.2 Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).

2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

2.4 Regulated Professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

3. Study Programme [ESG 1.2]

3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

3.2 Credits

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.

² https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmesv1_0-2015.pdf

3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]

4.1. Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

4.2. Recognition

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

5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]

5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

5.2 Assessment of students

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

6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]

The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.

7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

7.1 Staff

The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.

7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]

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

APPENDIX 2: IDENTIFICATION SHEET FOR THE JOINT PROGRAMME

This identification sheet should be completed by the person in charge of the joint programme and sent to Hcéres. It will help your contact person at Hcéres to understand your needs in order to prepare an appropriate agreement and budget.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE JOINT PROGRAMME (MANDATORY)	
Name of the joint programme	
Partners intuitions	
Campuses where the courses are delivered	
Academic degree(s) awarded	
Date of introduction	
Regular study period	
Number of ECTS	
Tuition fees	
Human resources (number of staff involved in the joint programme in the consortium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic staff: - Administrative staff:
Number of students in a cohort	
Tuition fees/year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For students residing in European Union countries: - For students residing in non-European countries:
National and international socioeconomic partners	
Any other useful information	

STUDENT NUMBERS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS (OPTIONAL)				
Please detail the number of students for each year and break it down by gender				
		2022-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
1 st year of master's	Male			
	Female			

degree	Total			
2 nd year of master's degree	Male			
	Female			
	Total			
Graduates	Male			
	Female			
	Total			

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM (OPTIONAL)	
Brief description of the process	
Key Performance Indicators	

PERSON IN CHARGE OF THE JOINT PROGRAMME OR PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE JOINT PROGRAMME (person to be contacted by Hcéres as mentioned in 2.1) (MANDATORY)	
Name	
Institution	
Position	
Email	
Phone number	

APPENDIX 3: SELF-EVALUATION FILE APPENDICES

The goal of the appendices is to attach evidences to demonstrate the compliance with the standards.

Examples of appendices to the Self-evaluation Report:

- Consortium agreement;
- Intended learning outcomes;
- Structure of the curriculum;
- Study and Examination regulations;
- Key Staff Expertise and CVs;
- Internal Quality Handbook/ Guide/ policy;
- Template Joint Diploma Supplement;
- Mentorship programme;
- Course syllabi;
- Organisational chart, specifying the functional links between central governance, administration, research and higher education entities;
- Mapping of similar programmes in the local or national context (if relevant);
- Quality assurance policy;
- Ethics policy.