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ANNEXES 1 to 3

ANNEXES

to the

Proposal for a Council Recommendation

on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education

{SWD(2024) 74 final}

ANNEX I

Building blocks for a cross-Institutional Quality Assurance Framework for alliances of Higher Education Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

The following building blocks are formulated to serve as a basis for the development of a full framework for a new cross-institutional quality assurance approach of alliances of higher education institutions. They build on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ funded projects QA-FIT and IMINQA. These building blocks were developed together with quality assurance stakeholders and is not intended to duplicate any other quality assurance processes. They will be further co-developed together with Member States and higher education stakeholders. They will serve as a voluntary tool that alliances of higher education institutions may use to ensure the quality and the efficiency of their jointly managed activities.

2. PURPOSE

In line with the principles of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)¹, a quality assurance evaluation should combine the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement, namely:

- (a) contribute to the Alliance's quality enhancement and support the Alliance in achieving its objectives; and
- (b) allow the Alliance to demonstrate the quality of its jointly managed activities.

As a result, the evaluation, to be carried out by a quality assurance agency selected by the Alliance, should:

- (a) acknowledge that the cooperation of higher education institutions is an Alliance, within the meaning of this Recommendation;
- (b) lead to a reduction in the administrative burden for the Alliance by enabling jointly managed activities to be externally quality assured jointly once during a set period of validity, instead of being subject to multiple national external quality assurance systems; and
- (c) facilitate the quality assurance of joint educational provision by Alliances, for example, joint programmes or micro-credentials.

3. PRINCIPLES

The evaluation methodology developed by quality assurance agencies should:

- (a) reflect the autonomy and diversity of Alliances;
- (b) encourage an Alliance to establish a joint internal quality assurance system covering all its joint education provision;
- (c) follow a once-only principle: the joint educational provision should be externally quality-assured only once within the same period of validity; and

¹ [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA 2015 MC 613727.pdf](#).

- (d) integrate all relevant parts of the ESG, the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and, where relevant, the European criteria for a European degree set out in Annex II to this Recommendation.

4. ELIGIBILITY

The evaluation should be open to any Alliance of higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area.

The Alliance should have some form of Alliance-level internal quality assurance that takes responsibility for certain jointly managed activities.

5. SCOPE

The focus of the evaluation should be the effectiveness of the Alliance's internal quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms.

6. THE ALLIANCE SHOULD DETERMINE AND MAKE TRANSPARENT WHICH JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND ACTIVITIES ARE SUBJECT TO THE COMMON, ALLIANCE-LEVEL INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE. KEY FEATURES

The evaluation should be based on standards that fully incorporate ESG Part 1.

The standards should also include confirmation that the Alliance's internal quality assurance ensures that:

- (a) joint education programmes offered by the Alliance comply with the standards of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes; and
- (b) joint education programmes meet the European criteria to deliver the European label, or as appropriate, the European degree, if the Alliance decides to deliver it.

The evaluation should be carried out by one EQAR-registered agency, chosen by the Alliance.

The evaluation should have a consistent methodology and procedure, to be set out in a full framework to be developed based on these building blocks, which are applied regardless of the EQAR-registered agency performing the evaluation.

The methodology should ensure that each procedure is tailored to the individual Alliance, considering the Alliance's mission, composition (for example, size and geographic spread), and the scope of jointly managed activities.

7. RESULTS AND CONSEQUENCES

The evaluation should result in a decision by the EQAR-registered agency, which could be positive, positive with conditions or negative.

A positive evaluation decision should give the Alliance the right to:

- (a) self-accredit its joint educational provision covered by the evaluation, using the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes standards; and
- (b) use the European label for those programmes that comply with the European degree (label) criteria, and deliver, if possible and on a voluntary basis, a European degree.

Member States should recognise a positive evaluation decision as follows:

- (a) for national external quality assurance at institutional level: exempt all joint education provision that is covered by a joint internal quality assurance that passed the evaluation from undergoing additional national quality assurance procedures; and
- (b) for national external quality assurance at programme level: exempt all programmes that are covered by a joint internal quality assurance that passed the evaluation from undergoing additional national quality assurance procedures.

ANNEX II

The European criteria set out the key features of the European degree and the European label. They guarantee the respect of the highest standards to offer transnational programmes and transnational degrees and explains why it is different from degrees awarded in other parts of the world.

Higher education institutions would be able to award the European degree based on an assessment by existing national structures (for example, national quality assurance agencies) of whether the joint programme fulfils all these European criteria.

The proposed European criteria that are presented below are the result of a huge collaborative work and testing that involved more than **140 higher education institutions across all Member States, 17 ministries and 20 national quality assurance agencies, students' organisations and economic and social partners.**

European criteria for a European degree (label)			EQF Levels
Transnational programme organisation and management	Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme is offered by at least 2 higher education institutions from at least 2 different Member States.	6, 7, 8
	Transnational joint degree delivery	The joint programme is jointly designed and jointly delivered by all the higher education institutions involved.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	6, 7, 8
		A joint Diploma Supplement ² is issued to students.	6, 7
	The joint programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide.		6, 7
			6, 7
	Joint arrangements for the joint programme	The joint programme has joint policies, procedures and/or arrangements defining curriculum planning and delivery, as well as all organisational and administrative matters. Students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint policies and procedures and/or arrangements.	6, 7, 8
	Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The higher education institutions, the study field or the programme are evaluated by an EQAR registered agency.	6, 7, 8
The joint programme is evaluated using the standards of the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes (EA).		6, 7, 8	
Graduate tracking	The joint programme monitors graduates through a graduate tracking system.	6, 7, 8	
Learning experience	Student-centred learning	The joint programme is designed and continuously enhanced and delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Assessment of students reflects this approach.	6, 7, 8

² [The Diploma Supplement | Europass.](#)

	Interdisciplinarity	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinarity components.	6, 7, 8
	Labour market relevance	The joint programme aligns with labour market requirements by incorporating intersectoral components or activities ³ and the development of transversal skills.	6, 7, 8
	Digital skills	The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of advanced digital skills of students, tailored to the capacities and circumstances of the joint programme, ensuring alignment with its scope and scholarly focus.	6, 7, 8
	Transnational campus – access to services	The programme has joint policies for students and staff to have access to relevant services in all participating higher educational institutions under equivalent conditions as all enrolled students and local staff.	6, 7, 8
	Flexible and embedded student mobility	The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a minimum of 1 period of student physical mobility (that can be split in several stays) at one or more partner institution(s) representing overall at least 60 ECTS at EQF 6 level and 30 ECTS at EQF 7 level. The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	6, 7
		The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at one or more partner institution(s). The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	8
	Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations	Dissertations are supervised by at least 2 supervisors and co-evaluated by co-supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	8
European Values	Democratic values	The joint programme's joint policies promote and adhere to democratic values.	6, 7, 8
	Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU languages.	6, 7, 8
	Inclusiveness	The joint programme commits to wide participation by fostering diversity, equality, and inclusion and by adopting tailored measures to support students and staff with fewer opportunities.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers.	8
	Green transition	The joint programme has policies and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	6,7, 8

³ Intersectoral components and activities include, but are not limited to, elements such as cooperation with economic and social sectors in curricula design and implementation, internships, work-based learning, secondment / placement, volunteering, service learning, challenge-based approaches.

ANNEX III

Glossary of Terms

Alliance: refers to a group of European higher education institutions that have entered a transnational long-term, structural cooperation that is confirmed in a joint mission statement endorsed by the relevant decision-making bodies at institutional level of each member of the alliance. This cooperation involves joint decision-making in governance aspects and includes offering joint education provision as a core mission. This includes, for example, those alliances of higher education institutions funded under the European Universities initiative⁴.

Educational provision refers to higher education provision in its broadest sense, including programmes leading to a full degree, courses leading to a micro-credential, as well as provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.

Evaluation: refers to a quality assurance review of a higher education institution or educational provision, carried out either internally or externally.

Joint programme refers to an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions, leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree.

Joint degree programme refers to a joint programme leading to a joint degree.

Jointly managed activities: refers to those activities of the Alliance and its member higher education institutions that the Alliance have decided to make subject to the Alliance's joint internal quality assurance system.

Quality assurance refers to the processes, both internal and external, carried out by a higher education institution or quality assurance agency, to ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are equitable and fit for purpose. Quality assurance activities have the twin purposes of:

- **Accountability:** A quality assurance system assures the higher education community and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities by compliance with a set of standards. It can be the basis for providing certain rights to the institution: recruiting students, awarding degrees, obtaining public funding.
- **Enhancement:** Quality assurance systems also provide advice and recommendations to and within higher education institutions on how they might improve what they are doing.

Taken together, accountability and enhancement of a quality assurance system create trust in the higher education institution's performance. They are key to supporting the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and staff to the institutional leadership and management. The term 'quality assurance' is used in this document to describe all activities within the continuous improvement cycle, i.e., both accountability and enhancement activities.

- (a) **Internal quality assurance** refers to the processes carried out internally by the higher education institutions themselves. They are usually developed as part of the

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[European Universities initiative | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_european_universities_initiative_en.pdf).

quality assurance strategy of higher education institutions, acknowledging their primary responsibility for the quality of their provisions and its assurance.

- (b) **External quality assurance** refers to the processes carried out by quality assurance agencies.
- (c) **Institutional approach to external quality assurance** means that the institution needs to go through an external quality assurance process at institutional level only, to assess the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes of the institution, and whether the institution has a sufficiently mature quality culture to ensure the high quality of its learning provisions. It allows the institution to develop and deliver programmes without the need for an external quality review at programme level (this is called self-accreditation in many countries).
- (d) **Programme approach to external quality assurance** means that each individual programme (or group of programmes) to be delivered by one or more higher education institution needs to go through an external quality assurance process review.
- (e) **Combined approach to external quality assurance** refers to a situation where a higher education system has both institutional and programme approaches to external quality assurance. This is the case in most higher education systems in the EU⁵.

⁵ According to responses to a 2023 Commission survey on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, 14 ministries reported that they apply a combined approach to external quality assurance.