

# Appendix 15: European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes tailored to Ghent University's Quality Conduct 2.0

## Introduction

The Quality Conduct 2.0 monitors and guarantees the quality of the Dutch- and English-taught study programmes with a NVAO accreditation (the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders). **Joint international study programmes** organized by a Flemish higher education institution in partnership with one or more higher education institutions abroad, and result in a **joint degree** (upon successful completion) follow a different procedure. These study programmes are assessed by means of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, approved by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area (2015).

### 1. International joint programmes (in Dutch: internationale opleidingen)

- **Master's programmes can be organized jointly by several institutions from different European or non-European countries.** In many, but not all, cases, these study programmes have European funding. In Dutch we speak of '**internationale programma's**', in English we refer to '**joint programmes**'. One institution takes on the co-ordination/ management of these programmes; the other institutions are partners;
- depending on their own legislation and mutual agreements between the participating countries, such a study programme can provide a **joint degree** by all institutions together, a **double or multiple degree(s)** is (are) awarded separately by the institutions or there is a mixture of both, i.e. a joint degree with a limited number of countries and double/multiple degree(s) by the others;
- **Ghent University** offers ten international study programmes. That number can vary. Each year, new proposals are submitted to the EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) of the European Commission and, upon successful evaluation of the dossier, funding is granted to set up a new study programme. On the other hand, the withdrawal of European funding in some cases leads to the discontinuation of a study programme;
- managing a joint programme is a complex matter, and so is its **quality assurance**. The participating countries each have **their own legislation**, in which **the accreditation terms and conditions for study programmes are rarely identical**. It is therefore quite a tall order for a study programme to meet the requirements of all participating countries.

### 2. The European Approach

- in 2015, the **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes** was adopted by the ministers from the 48 countries in the European Higher Education Area/the group of countries that signed the Bologna declaration. The European Approach provides a **broad evaluation framework** that is partly general and partly addresses the specific requirements of national legislation. It must allow **one evaluation/accreditation to be carried out**, which can be adopted in all countries involved. Its use is not binding, but does not come into effect until registered in national law;
- the Flemish Quality Code for Higher Education adds the following article (art. II.153/5) to the codex with effect from 1 September 2019:

'Joint programmes, which are organized by a **Flemish higher education institution** together with **one or more foreign higher education institutions** and which, on successful completion, lead to a **joint degree** as stated in Article II.172, §3, are assessed based on the **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**, approved by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area. For the organization of this **external evaluation**, institutions can call on an **evaluation body** that is registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Institutions apply for accreditation from the **accreditation organization within two months of the publication** of the external evaluation of the study programme;'

- the quality of a study programme is demonstrated in the European Approach based on a framework of nine standards, which is closely related to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015). Based on the ESG, NVAO has drawn up eight quality features that are inherent to a high-quality higher education programme. Both frameworks are elaborations of the ESG and make it possible to determine whether a programme meets the ESG. The presence of the following eight quality features is therefore guaranteed for every study programme whose quality is satisfactory.
  1. the programme's learning outcomes constitute a clear and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content and orientation;
  2. the programme's curriculum ties in with the most recent developments in the discipline, takes into account developments in the professional field and is relevant to society;
  3. the staff allocated to the programme offer the students optimal opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes;
  4. the study programme offers students adequate and easily accessible services, facilities and counselling;
  5. the teaching and learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the learning process and fosters smooth study progress;
  6. student assessment reflects the learning process and materializes the intended learning outcomes;
  7. the programme provides comprehensive and easily readable information on all phases of the study career;
  8. Information regarding the quality of the programme is publicly available.
- in addition, in continuous pursuit of quality development, a study programme should ensure the involvement of internal and external stakeholders on the one hand, and external and independent peers and experts on the other. Where applicable, a study programme must comply with regulations governing access to corresponding offices or professions;
- **every six years**, an **EQAR-registered QA agency** will evaluate all international study programmes.

### 3. The European Approach Tailored to *Quality Conduct 2.0*

- Ghent University wants **for all its international programmes an approach that is as unambiguous as possible. That is why the choice fell on the European Approach tailored to the *Quality Conduct 2.0*.**

This means:

- Art. II.153/5 makes a distinction between study programmes with a **joint degree**, for which an appeal is made to an external evaluation body, and study programmes **without a joint degree**, which would fall under the *Quality Conduct*. Whether or not a

joint degree is awarded is **not an essential characteristic of education quality**, but is the result of the prevailing legislation.

➤ **Ghent University uses the same approach for all international programmes (including those that do not lead to a joint degree) via the European Approach Tailored to the *Quality Conduct***

– Art. II.153/5 is only valid for **study programmes that have no previous NVAO accreditation**. In principle, the already accredited joint programmes can be included in *Quality Conduct 2.0*

### 3.1 Scenario 1: European Approach for all joint programmes not yet accredited by NVAO (currently 4 study programmes). These study programmes have a temporary accreditation.

#### 4.1.1 Ghent University as Co-ordinator: European Approach by VLUHR-QA and accreditation by NVAO

- about 2 years before the expiry of the transitional accreditation period, the Education Department will contact the study programme co-ordinators and VLUHR-QA;
- shortly afterwards there is an **information meeting** at which all partners of the consortium are represented. VLUHR-QA discusses the process and the way in which the study programme will demonstrate that it meets the standards;
- then, at the latest one and a half years before the transitional accreditation period expires, the programme starts **writing the self-evaluation report (SER)**:
  - the SER is a document that is supported by all members of the consortium;
  - content:
    - outline of the national contexts;
    - discussion and explanation of the nine standards;
    - critical, analytical and future-oriented;
    - possible supporting documents tailored to the study programme;
    - language: the language of the study programme
    - length: 20,000 words + 2,500 words per additional partner
- at the same time, the study programme proposes **names of experts for the four-member panel**
  - the experts are authoritative, independent and combine international, professional, industry, educational evaluation and student-related expertise;
  - important requirement: knowledge of higher education and the language of the study programme;
  - the experts represent at least 2 countries involved in the study programme;
  - the composition of the panel is discussed and approved by the management committee of VLUHR-QA;
- review process
  - 3 months before the visit, the SER is delivered to VLUHR-QA, and through them, to the panel;
  - the panel is prepared and trained;
  - before the site visit, there is a preparatory meeting with VLUHR-QA and the study programme, during which the practicalities of the site visit are discussed;
  - the **site visit lasts 1 day and takes place at 1 location**. During the visit, representatives of all locations are present/available, more specifically: programme co-ordinators, lecturers, students, alumni, professional field

- report:
    - the panel writes a report in which it assesses the training on the 9 standards according to the following criteria: compliant, partially compliant, non-compliant;
    - the study programme can respond to the draft report in 2 phases. An appeal is also possible before the final report;
    - the final report is adopted by the VLUHR-QA Management Committee;
  - **the EQB takes note of the VLUHR-QA report;**
  - the Education Department submits the application **for accreditation to NVAO** on behalf of the vice-chancellor, based on the report of VLUHR-QA;
    - NVAO accredits the study programme (if the report is positive)
  - **publicly available information** is published on the websites of Ghent University, NVAO and VLUHR-QA.
- **every six years, an EQAR-registered QA agency** will evaluate all international study programmes. For the study programmes co-ordinated by Ghent University, this is agency is VLUHR-QA<sup>1</sup>. For study programmes not co-ordinated by Ghent University, the mediation of VLUHR-KZ can be suggested to the international partners, but the co-ordinating institution is free to call on any other EQAR registered QA agency;
  - **the result of the evaluation by these external bodies and its follow-up will be incorporated as much as possible into the Quality Conduct 2.0.** This means that the Education Quality Board will take note of the accreditation decision and will make it publicly available on its website. Furthermore, **2 interim follow-up moments** will be provided so that the principle of a continuous quality culture that is characteristic of the Quality Conduct 2.0 is maintained.

#### 4. Procedure European Approach Tailored to Quality Conduct 2.0

The Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA) draws up a calendar which contains the accreditation period and the possible scenario for each joint programme. Updates of that calendar are sent annually to the programme co-ordinators and respective Directors of Study.

Working with an EQAR registered agency is not free of charge. The Education Department supervises the study programme in preparation for and during the evaluation and also covers the costs charged by the agency.

##### 4.1.2 Ghent University not as Co-ordinator: European Approach by an EQAR registered QA agency abroad and accreditation by NVAO

- from the start of the study programme, the Education Department advises the Ghent University study programme co-ordinators to be well informed about the accreditation status of the co-ordinator and all partners. It also provides the timing for accreditation in Flanders;
- during an annual consultation, the Education Department and the Ghent University study programme co-ordinator closely monitor whether the co-ordinating partner is preparing an evaluation/accreditation in its own country and whether they are using the European Approach;
- if the co-ordinator follows its own equivalent procedure (with an EQAR registered QA agency), the Education Department supports the study programme during the participation in that procedure. This involves, among other things, support in co-writing the SER and, if desired, participation in discussions during the site visit;
- if the co-ordinator does not follow an (sufficiently) equivalent procedure, an appeal is made to VLUHR-QA and the procedure described under 4.1.1. is followed;
- **The EQB takes note of the evaluation report of the EQAR registered QA agency;**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/>

- the Education Department submits the application for **accreditation to NVAO** on behalf of the vice-chancellor, based on the report of the EQAR registered agency (possibly VLUHR-QA);
- NVAO accredits the study programme (in case of a positive report);
- **publicly available information** is published on the website of Ghent University, NVAO and the QA agency.

#### **4.1 Scenario 2: European Approach for all joint programmes already accredited by NVAO (currently 6 programmes); falls entirely under Quality Conduct**

##### 4.2.1 Ghent University as Co-ordinator: European Approach every 6 years by VLUHR-QA

- same procedure as described under 4.1.1 with one major change: **the VLUHR-QA Management Committee adopts a quality assurance resolution on the study programme;**
- the EQB takes note of this quality assurance resolution;
- publicly available information is published on the websites of Ghent University site + VLUHR-QA.

##### 4.2.2 Ghent University not as Co-ordinator

- the timing and approach of the co-ordinating institution is followed. Preferably the European Approach by an EQAR registered QA agency abroad;
- if the co-ordinator does not follow an (sufficiently) equivalent procedure, it can be advised to designate VLUHR-QA as agency, in which case the procedure described under 4.1.2. is followed;
- **the EQB takes note of the quality assurance resolution;**
- publicly available information is published on the Ghent University website + EQAR registered agency (possibly VLUHR-QA).

#### **4.2 Follow-up in Quality Conduct 2.0**

- **follow-up: for each international programme**, Ghent University organizes a **biennial reflection** on the standards of the European Approach, including the response to the panel's recommendations. This process is supervised by VLUHR-QA and a process supervisor from the Education Department. It results in a reflection report of the study programme + a quality improvement plan;
- the EQB takes note of the follow-up reports, **these are internal documents.**