

# Guidelines for assessing joint study programme

Approved by the Assessment Council of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency 21.02.2013

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## I GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Pursuant to § 22<sup>4</sup> subsection 3 of the Universities Act, the Ministry of Education and Research may involve the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (hereinafter the EHEQA) in assessing a joint study programme if the verification of an application submitted in order to register a joint study programme and the data appended to it do not reveal whether the quality of studies to be conducted in the joint study programme is sufficient and whether the learning outcomes described in the joint study programme can be achieved with the study programme.
2. The EHEQA shall assess the conformity of the joint study programme to the requirements provided in legislation, which are described in subsection II of these guidelines.
3. The Ministry of Education and Research will specify in the initial task issued to the EHEQA which requirements of subsection II of the guidelines have been met and which require expert assessment by the EHEQA. The Ministry of Education and Research also sends a copy of the initial task to the institution of higher education that submitted the application.

## II REQUIREMENTS OF JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME

### 4. General requirements

- 4.1. A joint study programme is opened within the same level of higher education or in the case of cooperation with a foreign institution of higher education, within a level equal to the Estonian level of higher education, and all institutions of higher education participating in the joint study programme must have the right to conduct studies at this level.
- 4.2. All institutions of higher education must have the right to conduct relevant studies and issue relevant academic degrees and diplomas in the study programme group in which they participate pursuant to the cooperation contract for the joint study programme, with the exception of the right issued for one to three years. This

clause does not apply to the part conducted in a foreign institution of higher education.

- 4.3. At least one institution of higher education participating in the joint study programme must have the right to conduct studies and issue relevant academic degrees and diplomas in the same study programme group as the joint study programme, with the exception of the right issued for one to three years. This clause does not apply to the part conducted in a foreign institution of higher education.
- 4.4. If part of the joint study programme is conducted in a foreign institution of higher education, this institution must be approved by a competent authority of the foreign country and the graduation certificates issued by the institution must be approved in the foreign country.
- 4.5. The cooperation contract of the joint study programme clearly provides the terms and conditions for continuing studies and the procedure in the case of one party forgoing or significantly altering the cooperation contract of the joint study programme.
- 4.6. The cooperation contract for the joint study programme clearly defines the terms and conditions and procedure for terminating the cooperation contract for a joint study programme, including the obligations of institutions of higher education in ensuring that students can continue their studies.

## **5. Organisation of studies**

- 5.1. The joint rules of organisation of studies defined in the cooperation contract are based on legislation and include the following aspects: accepting a student; language of studies; learning and grading in different educational institutions; determining conformity in the case of different grading systems; taking into account prior studies and work experience; exmatriculation; graduation; procedure and requirements for issuing qualifications, graduation certificates and copies thereof; and the basis and procedure for funding studies and related organisational work, including requirements and procedure for funding the part conducted in a foreign educational institution.
- 5.2. A significant part of the joint study programme is conducted at the other institution of higher education participating in the joint study programme in the extent agreed in the cooperation contract of the joint study programme, wherein studying in all forms of study is deemed studying at the other institution of higher education participating in the joint study programme, and the significant part must form at least 20% of the volume of the joint study programme.

- 5.3. Studies completed in institutions of higher education participating in the joint study programme are automatically and completely recognised by institutions of higher education participating in the joint study programme.
- 5.4. Advisory and support systems concerning learning and teaching in different institutions of higher education are ensured.
- 5.5. If there is a fee for studies, the terms and conditions and procedure for establishing it, exemption from it and granting discounts and study support exist.

## **6. Ensuring quality of joint study programme and studies conducted on its basis**

- 6.1. The joint study programme has been jointly developed and approved by all institutions of higher education participating in the joint study programme.
- 6.2. The joint study programme conforms to the standard of higher education, and if part of the joint study programme is conducted in a foreign institution of higher education, the parts of the joint study programme conducted in various countries must conform to the relevant requirements of those countries.
- 6.3. The knowledge, skills and attitudes set as goals of study in the joint study programme can be achieved with the joint study programme.
- 6.4. The basis for ensuring the quality of a joint study programme (including the feedback system, development of the study programme and requirements of lecturers) take into consideration the quality assurance standards and guidelines of European higher education and have been approved by the participating institutions of higher education. The division of responsibilities in ensuring the quality of a joint study programme is clearly defined between the participating institutions of higher education.
- 6.5. The rights and obligations of students and lecturers of educational institutions participating in the joint study programme are clearly defined.
- 6.6. The cooperation contract clearly sets out the procedure for resolving disputes concerning the execution of the joint study programme, which ensures the protection of the rights of students and lecturers.
- 6.7. Institutions of higher education in the joint study programme have agreed on the procedure for external evaluation of the joint study

programme, which takes into consideration the requirements for external evaluation of participating countries, including taking into consideration the need to participate in the external evaluation of another country.

7. At the request of the Ministry, the EHEQA will, in addition to the above, also assess the conformity of the joint study programme to requirements established for lecturers and resources for the initial assessment of a study programme group described in points 8-9 of the EHEQA document 'Instructions for initial assessment of a study programme group'. ([http://ekka.archimedes.ee/files/Esmahindamise%20kord\\_muudetud\\_27.09.12.pdf](http://ekka.archimedes.ee/files/Esmahindamise%20kord_muudetud_27.09.12.pdf))

### III ORGANISATION OF EXPERT ASSESSMENT

8. The conformity of joint study programmes to requirements will be assessed by a committee of 2-3 members formed on the order of the manager of the EHEQA, which includes at least one expert from the study programme group and one member of the EHEQA assessment council. The manager of the EHEQA will approve the committee within two weeks of the Ministry issuing the initial task to the EHEQA.
- 8<sup>1</sup>. The member of the assessment committee is independent in his or her work and does not represent the interests of the organisation of which he or she is a member. The member of the committee will confirm with his or her signature that he or she will maintain the confidentiality of any information gained during assessment and the lack of any conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are presumed in the following cases:
- 8<sup>1</sup>.1. The member of the committee has professional or other contractual relations with the institute of higher education being assessed at the time of assessment or he or she had contractual relations with the institute of higher education being assessed in the five years prior to the assessment visit.
  - 8<sup>1</sup>.2. The member of the committee is a member of the executive or supervisory board of the institute of higher education being assessed at the time of assessment.
  - 8<sup>1</sup>.3. The member of the committee is studying at the institute of higher education being assessed or graduated from it less than three years previously.
  - 8<sup>1</sup>.4. Those connected to the study programme group of the institute of higher education being assessed include a person close to the member of the committee (spouse/partner, child or parent).

9. The office of the EHEQA will inform the educational institution about the membership of the committee and the institution may provide its position on the matter, also applying for the inclusion of an additional expert in the committee, which is to be treated as a notice or application for explanation in the meaning of point 15 of the document.
10. During the expert assessment, the committee will conduct an assessment inspection if necessary, the organisation of which is conducted pursuant to the procedure described in points 16-18 of the EHEQA document 'Instructions for initial assessment of study programme group'. The submitter of the application ensures that the committee is able to meet with representatives of all of the educational institutions participating in the joint study programme. An assessment inspection can be replaced with interviews in various formats (e.g. Skype or video conferences) with representatives of the educational institutions participating in the joint study programme.
11. On the basis of the initial task set by the Ministry of Education and Research, the committee will assess the conformity of the joint study programme to requirements based on the application of the institution of higher education and the appended materials and the additional written and oral information from the institution, and provide the EHEQA with an assessment report within three (3) months of receiving the initial task.
12. The EHEQA will forward the report to the institution of higher education, which then has five business days in which to submit any comments.
13. The committee will formalise the final assessment report within five business days of receiving the comments and forward it to the EHEQA office.
14. The manager of the EHEQA will compile a letter to the Ministry of Education and Research on the basis of the report within seven days, presenting the reasoned opinion of the EHEQA regarding the conformity of the joint study programme to requirements and recommendations for eliminating deficiencies, where necessary. The Minister of Education and Research will make the final decision on registering the joint study programme.
15. If the institution of higher education feels that the rules described in the guidelines have not been followed in the activities of the EHEQA or the assessment committee in organising and conducting the expert assessment, it can submit an application for an explanation or a notice to the manager of the EHEQA, who will provide a reasoned written response within 30 days of registering the application.