

European Approach for Joint Programmes in a Nutshell

One integrated review of the joint programme, professionally coordinated through AQAS's extensive European Approach experience.

AQAS reviews a joint programme as one integrated whole across all partner institutions, delivery locations and national settings. The consortium works through one coordinated procedure, one international expert panel and one coherent report. This reduces duplication and gives all partners a shared external perspective on the quality and further development of their programme. With more than 20 completed European Approach procedures, AQAS combines independent peer review with the practical coordination needed to make a complex multi-country procedure manageable.

SUITABLE FOR

Joint Bachelor's and Master's programmes offered by consortia across different countries

AQAS EXPERIENCE

More than 20 completed European Approach procedures and contribution to the ImpEA implementation project

REVIEW

One joint submission, one international panel, one coordinated site visit and one report on the programme as a whole

DECISION

AQAS Standing Commission; a positive decision is valid for six years



What AQAS reviews

AQAS applies the European standards developed specifically for joint provision. They focus on whether the consortium has created a genuinely joint and coherent programme - from its learning outcomes and curriculum to admission, recognition, delivery, student support and quality assurance. The panel considers how the partners combine their academic strengths, distribute responsibilities and assure a consistent student experience across institutions and national systems.

Eligibility	Learning outcomes	Study programme
Admission and recognition	Learning, teaching and assessment	Student support
Resources	Transparency and documentation	Quality assurance

PREPARATION AND PEER REVIEW



Preparation: one shared basis for the review

The procedure begins with a scoping conversation. AQAS clarifies the partner institutions and countries, the status of the programme, the degree arrangements, responsibilities, delivery locations and languages, as well as the intended timetable and site-visit format. Questions relevant to the use of the outcome in the participating countries are identified at this early stage. AQAS then prepares an individual procedure plan and quotation.

A dedicated AQAS consultant remains the central contact for the whole consortium. A preliminary workshop, normally online and available on site if requested, explains the European Approach criteria, the documentation, the roles of the partners and the sequence of the review. This creates a common understanding across the consortium without anticipating the independent assessment.

The partners submit one joint self-evaluation report. It presents the programme as a shared academic endeavour and explains how its elements form a coherent whole. It also provides the national context needed to understand the position of the programme and its degrees in each participating system.

Core evidence normally includes the consortium or cooperation agreement, the curriculum and module descriptions, joint learning outcomes, admission and recognition arrangements, examination rules, staff and resource information, quality-assurance evidence, public information and sample degree documentation. AQAS checks the submission for completeness, provides structured feedback and requests clarification where needed before preparing the initial report for the Standing Commission.

The service experience: one dedicated AQAS contact, early clarity on the multi-country setting, an agreed schedule and structured feedback while the consortium prepares its joint submission.



International expert panel

AQAS appoints an independent international panel of at least four members. Collectively, it combines expertise in the relevant academic field, professional practice and the labour market, higher education quality assurance and the student perspective. It also covers the higher education systems represented in the consortium and the languages of instruction. The panel includes members from at least two countries involved in the consortium.

The consortium may propose the qualification profile required, but not individual names, and may raise reasoned objections to the proposed composition. All experts confirm their impartiality. They receive written guidance, submit preliminary statements and take part in a procedure-specific preparatory meeting led by AQAS. This brings the panel's different national and stakeholder perspectives together before the site visit.



Site visit: one programme across all partners

The site visit is normally organised at one location, while the programme's provision at all partner institutions and delivery sites is considered. The panel meets representatives of every cooperating institution, including institutional and programme management, teaching staff, students and other relevant stakeholders such as graduates and representatives of professional practice. The site visit can take place in a hybrid format, if required.

The discussions examine both the programme itself and how the consortium works together: joint ownership, academic coherence, decision-making, mobility, recognition, communication and joint quality assurance. AQAS allows sufficient time for substantive dialogue rather than limiting meetings to information collection. The visit concludes with brief verbal feedback on the panel's principal impressions.

DECISION, FOLLOW-UP AND NEXT STEPS



One report and one AQAS decision

Following the site visit, the panel prepares one reasoned report on the entire joint programme. It contains evidence, analysis and conclusions for each European Approach standard and pays particular attention to the programme's joint character. AQAS coordinates the drafting process. Once the panel has confirmed the draft, the consortium can comment and request correction of factual errors before the report is finalised.

The AQAS Standing Commission considers the final report, the panel's recommendation and the consortium's comments. The outcome of a procedure can either result in: a) accreditation without conditions, b) accreditation with conditions, c) postponement of the procedure or d) denial of accreditation. A positive decision (a or b) is valid for six years.

The consortium receives one decision on the outcome which can be recognized by the agencies in the participating countries. At the start of the procedure, AQAS works with the consortium to identify how the report and decision can be used in the participating systems and coordinates necessary information exchange where required. The legal effect remains governed by the applicable national frameworks. After the objection period, AQAS publishes the decision, the final report and the panel members' names on its website and in DEQAR.



Follow-up, changes and reaccreditation

If conditions are imposed, the consortium normally has twelve months to describe and document how they have been fulfilled. Usually, the evidence provided by the consortium is assessed by the experts. The Standing Commission then takes the final follow-up decision, based on the comments provided by the experts. In some cases, a grace period of three months may be granted which gives a chance to hand in additional evidence. If conditions are ultimately not fulfilled, the accreditation is withdrawn by the Standing Commission.

In cases where the Standing Commission decides to postpone its decision, the procedure may be resumed after the identified shortcomings have been addressed, within a maximum period of 18 months. Revised documentation must be handed in by the consortium and is reviewed by the panel. If required by the panel or the Commission, a further digital or confirmation visit may take place.

During the six-year accreditation period, AQAS must be informed about changes in the consortium or other major changes to the programme.

In a reaccreditation process after six years, the programme is reviewed as a joint whole, with particular attention to its development, evidence from implementation, the response to previous findings and the consortium's collective use of quality-assurance information.

PLANNING A PROCEDURE

Share the partner institutions and countries, the degree arrangements, the programme's current stage and the intended timeframe with the AQAS International Team. We will help clarify the appropriate scope, questions relevant to the participating national systems, and the practical organisation of the review. AQAS will prepare an individual procedure plan and quotation for the consortium.

Contact the AQAS International Team