

# A3ES

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Agência de Avaliação  
e Acreditação  
do Ensino Superior

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## **A3ES ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION OF JOINT INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES**

***European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes***

May, 2025

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the assessment and accreditation procedures adopted by A3ES for international joint programmes.

It focuses on the European-level mechanisms that support these processes, in alignment with national legislation and regulatory frameworks.

The report is structured into four main chapters:

- Quality assurance of joint international Programs: The European approach perspective and state-of-the-art
- National Legislative Framework: Context for the assessment and accreditation of international joint programmes in Portugal.
- Quality Assurance Standards: Overview of the standards applicable to joint programmes within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- A3ES Procedures: Description of the Agency's procedures for assessing and accrediting joint programmes, including:
  - The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
  - Alternative Procedures applied by A3ES for cases outside the scope of the European Approach

## 2. EUROPEAN APPROACH PERSPECTIVE AND STATE OF THE ART

Following the Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012) and the work carried out by the Bologna Follow-up Group (2013–2014), quality assurance of joint programmes across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) gained significant visibility and strategic importance. The main goal was to develop a common framework for external quality assurance that would streamline and harmonize procedures across different national systems.

*“Develop a policy proposal for a specific accreditation approach for Joint Programmes, which should be applied to all those joint programmes that are subject to compulsory programme accreditation at national level.”*

(Bologna Follow-Up Group Work Programme, 2013–2015)

Joint programmes are defined as an “integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree” (EQAR.eu). As with all higher education programmes, these joint offers require external quality assurance to be accredited and validated.

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, adopted by the EHEA Ministers in 2015, was designed to streamline the external quality assurance (EQA) of transnational joint programmes. Grounded in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the European Approach (EA) aims to reduce duplicative accreditation procedures and foster trust among higher education institutions (HEIs) and quality assurance (QA) agencies.

Despite its numerous conceptual strengths and virtues, the full adoption of the European Approach remains far from achieving the expected and desirable outcomes. Below is a summary of “*both sides of the coin*”, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the matter.

### 2.1. EA - MAIN STRENGTHS AND VIRTUES

One of the most significant strengths of the European Approach is its potential to simplify quality assurance processes for joint programmes that are inherently complex due to their transnational nature. By requiring a single external QA procedure, carried out in cooperation with one registered EQAR agency, and accepted by all relevant national authorities, the EA promotes:

- Efficiency and coherence in evaluation procedures, as allows for a single external quality assurance procedure to be applied to joint programmes, replacing the need for multiple, parallel national accreditations. This results in a more streamlined, coordinated, and efficient process, reducing redundancy and ensuring that joint programmes are evaluated holistically rather than through fragmented national lenses. The coherence it brings to the evaluation process is particularly crucial in the context of transnational cooperation, where partners operate under diverse QA requirements;
- Reduction of administrative and bureaucratic burden for HEIs, by eliminating the obligation to undergo separate accreditation procedures in each participating country. By performing one single external assessment process, HEIs can focus their resources on programme

development, implementation, and improvement, rather than navigating complex and overlapping bureaucratic procedures. This simplification is especially beneficial for smaller institutions or those engaging in internationalisation efforts with limited administrative capacity;

- Enhanced cooperation between institutions across different EHEA countries, as it encourages institutions from different EHEA countries to collaborate more openly and flexibly, knowing that quality assurance will be addressed through a unified process. This fosters deeper academic cooperation, strengthens institutional partnerships, and promotes innovation in curriculum design, delivery, and assessment. By removing QA-related barriers, the approach enhances trust and shared responsibility among partner institutions;
- Increased visibility and attractiveness of joint programmes. Joint programmes that are assessed under the EA are perceived as having undergone rigorous and transparent evaluation aligned with EHEA standards. This enhances their credibility and international visibility, making them more attractive to students, employers, and academic partners. Additionally, the clarity and legitimacy conferred by a single, registered EQAR Quality Agency process supports the branding and positioning of joint degrees in a competitive global education landscape;
- Mutual trust and recognition among national QA agencies and stakeholders. At the core of the EA lies the principle of mutual trust, which underpins the broader Bologna Process. The use of a single procedure conducted by a QA agency listed on EQAR promotes reciprocal recognition of QA outcomes across borders. This reinforces confidence not only among agencies, but also among governments, institutions, and students. Moreover, the opportunity to work within an international environment, facilitated by the participation of international experts in the assessment panels, further reinforces the aforementioned confidence and trust. As such, the European Approach serves as a practical expression of the shared commitment to quality and transparency within the EHEA.

## **2.2. EA - BOTTLENECKS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

Despite its conceptual strengths and political endorsement, the European Approach still faces significant practical limitations. A persistent challenge lies in the divergence of national legal frameworks, which may not yet accommodate or fully recognise a single QA procedure carried out under the European Approach. These legal obstacles include<sup>1</sup>:

- National requirements for programme accreditation that remain binding, even for joint degrees;

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<sup>1</sup> “Concerns raised by the [IMPEA project](#)’s analytical report, as well as reports from the Bologna Process Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance (2019) highlight several issues that complicate the use of the European Approach. These are related to differences in the duration of external quality assurance cycles, inconsistencies in qualifications across diverse higher education systems, language requirements for review reports and decisions to align with national administrative laws, the absence of clear and structured procedural guidelines, discrepancies in the definition of joint programmes in various systems (affecting eligibility for the European Approach), and variations in the overarching objectives of joint programme accreditation” (QA-FIT project – State of Play and perspectives for the future, May 2024, pp.14).

- Incompatibilities between national frameworks in terms of decision-making procedures, criteria, or agency recognition;
- Lack of legal provisions to accept foreign QA decisions in some jurisdictions.

Additionally, there remains a degree of institutional hesitance and lack of confidence among both HEIs and QA agencies. This is often due to:

- Limited familiarity with the procedure;
- Perceived risks associated with relying on a foreign agency;
- Concerns about credibility or acceptance of the results by national authorities;
- Uncertainty about long-term sustainability and political support for the mechanism;
- Implementation and uptake.

Although several agencies (including EQAR-registered ones) have piloted and implemented EA procedures with success, the number of actual applications remains modest. The approach is generally welcomed in principle, yet its practical uptake is uneven across the EHEA. Success stories exist where national frameworks explicitly support the use of the European Approach, but they are still the exception rather than the norm.

### 3. PORTUGUESE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

National legislation regulates the provision of international joint programmes (*graus em associação*), establishing general principles concerning quality assurance and degree awarding.

International joint degrees involving Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are governed by [Decree-Law no. 65/2018, of 16 August](#), and its recent amendment by [Decree-Law nº 27/2021, article 6](#), known as the Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas in Higher Education. Relevant provisions are found in Chapter VI – Award of Degrees and Diplomas in Association, specifically in Articles 41, 42, and 43.

Within this legislative framework, the following key points should be highlighted:

- International joint academic degrees involving Portuguese HEIs must be accredited by A3ES and registered with DGES (*Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior*);
- The Agency may incorporate into the accreditation process the results of evaluation and accreditation procedures conducted by foreign or international institutions that operate in accordance with the principles adopted by the European system of quality assurance in higher education, namely by other EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies.

Additionally, A3ES Management Board Deliberation no. [474/2023, of 8 May](#), sets out the general guidelines for the Agency's procedures regarding quality assurance processes.

It is important to note that the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has not yet been explicitly integrated into Portuguese legislation.

## 4. STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN EHEA

Overall, all the quality assurance procedures conducted within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are based and framed by the European Standards and guidelines (ESG).

Below, a brief description of the standards used (as in Part B of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes). Please, bear in mind that additional national criteria are not considered.

### 4.1. ELIGIBILITY

#### 4.1.1. 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.

#### 4.1.2. JOINT PROGRAMME DESIGN AND DELIVERY

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

The programme proposal documentation should include:

- Programme name degree, and duration in years and in ECTS credits and corresponding descriptors in QF-EHEA;
- Programme aims and objectives;
- Applicant institution and the institutions in the consortium;
- Modality of teaching and main language of the programme;
- Expected incoming student numbers for first academic year;
- Programme regulations.

#### 4.1.3. COOPERATION AGREEMENT<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [Links to templates and examples of cooperation agreements are available in 'Joint Programmes from A to Z - A reference guide for practitioners' \(2020\)](#)



Defines the terms and conditions of the joint programme that should be considered in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should include:

- 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 staff;
- Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

## **4.2. LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### **4.2.1. LEVEL [ESG 1.2]**

The intended learning outcomes should align with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the Portuguese National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The intended learning outcomes should correspond to those for similar national and international programmes at the level.

### **4.2.2. DISCIPLINARY FIELD**

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

### **4.2.3. ACHIEVEMENT [ESG 1.2]**

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

### **4.2.4. 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 considered.

## **4.3. STUDY PROGRAMME [ESG 1.2]**

### **4.3.1. CURRICULUM**

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

#### 4.3.2. CREDITS

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

#### 4.3.3. WORKLOAD

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180 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 the credit range can vary from 180-240 ECTS credits.

### 4.4. ADMISSION AND RECOGNITION [ESG 1.4]

#### 4.4.1. ADMISSION

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

#### 4.4.2. 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.

### 4.5. LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT [ESG 1.3]

#### 4.5.1. 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.

#### 4.5.2. 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.

#### **4.6. STUDENT SUPPORT [ESG 1.6]**

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

#### **4.7. RESOURCES [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]**

##### **4.7.1. STAFF**

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

##### **4.7.2. FACILITIES**

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

#### **4.8. TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION [ESG 1.8]**

Relevant information about the programme, such as, admission requirements and procedures, programme handbook, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published, considering the specific needs of mobile students.

#### **4.9. 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.

### 5.1. PROCEDURES BASED ON THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

A3ES is an agency accredited with ENQA and registered with **EQAR** and is therefore authorized to conduct accreditation procedures based on the European Approach.

A3ES may participate in these procedures in two distinct roles:

- a) As the leading agency responsible for coordinating the assessment process;
- b) As a partner or observer agency, contributing to the evaluation process without leading it.

The European Approach is grounded in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), as outlined in the previous section.

#### 5.1.1 A3ES AS THE EA LEADING AGENCY

##### ***PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS AND PREPARATORY STEPS***

For evaluating the eligibility of the procedure under the European Approach, the higher education institution (HEI) must express its intention to submit a joint international programme for assessment by contacting A3ES via email to A3ES Management Board: [a3es@a3es.pt](mailto:a3es@a3es.pt) and Raquel Santos, as a Project Coordinator: [raquelsantos@a3es.pt](mailto:raquelsantos@a3es.pt).

Following verification of the legal and administrative compliance of the proposal, A3ES will issue guidance on the necessary steps to be taken and provide instructions for the submission of the process through the SIA3ES platform.

Whenever possible, the HEI should designate a direct contact person from the coordinating institution to facilitate the resolution of procedural matters.

##### ***COMMITMENT AND ROLE OF THE COORDINATING INSTITUTION***

Effective cooperation between all accreditation agencies or authorities from the countries represented in the consortium is highly recommended, to minimize challenges related to the official recognition of qualifications and registration procedures.

It is essential that all partner and observer agencies or accreditation authorities are involved from the outset. For this purpose, a designated contact person should be identified within each organization to monitor the process and provide clarifications if needed.

To formalize this cooperation, an expression of Commitment must be settled among all relevant national accreditation bodies, confirming that all phases of the procedure will be respected—particularly the final decision. As a leading Agency, A3ES will be responsible for settling this commitment.

### **THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SER)<sup>3</sup>**

The external quality assurance process is based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which is jointly developed by the institutions forming the consortium. This report serves as the primary reference throughout the assessment process and should clearly highlight the distinctive features of the joint programme, particularly its collaborative nature and compliance with the standards outlined in Chapter 3. The SER must be submitted by the coordinating institution to A3ES, as previously agreed.

Given the collaborative effort required to prepare, draft, and approve the SER, a significant amount of time is expected for its development. The assessment roadmap should account for this period, which may be estimated at six to nine months of preparation.

The final version of the SER must be submitted to A3ES and made available to the review panel at least six weeks prior to the site visit (this timeline may be adjusted if necessary). A3ES SER template is based on the one suggested by the [IMPEA Project](#), which comprehensively address all standards specified in Section 3.

### **EXTERNAL EXPERTS REVIEW PANEL**

A3ES will appoint a review panel consisting of at least four members to evaluate the joint programme. The external panel will include three academic/professional specialists, as well as one student representative.

In accordance with the European Approach, the review panel will include members from at least two countries represented within the consortium. Ideally, all the national agencies involved in the accreditation of the programme should designate an external evaluator and agree on the composition of the experts' panel.

The working language of the assessment process, including reports and the site visit, will be English. Therefore, all review panel members must have sufficient proficiency in the English language.

In line with A3ES's internal procedures, the composition of the panel will be balanced in terms of gender representation and will include reviewers from diverse backgrounds. Before the appointment, all panel members must confirm the absence of any potential conflicts of interest with the institutions or the joint programme under assessment.

As is customary in other national assessment processes, the panel will be led by a Chair, who will coordinate the panel's activities and take overall responsibility for the panel's work. The Chair will be responsible for:

- Maintaining regular communication with A3ES,
- Preparing the schedule for the assessment process,
- Organizing the panel's internal documentation,

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3 - <https://impea.eu/guide-for-self-evaluation-report/>

- Moderating discussions during the site visit,
- Ensuring that the final report is drafted within the agreed timeline.

Following the appointment of the panel, the A3ES project coordinator will organize a preparatory meeting to brief the panel on:

- The panel's responsibilities and tasks,
- The specificities of the quality assurance procedure based on the European Approach,
- The distinctive features of the joint programme,
- Timelines and expected deliverables.

During the review of the documentation, the panel may request additional information for clarification, either prior to or during the site visit. All information exchanged must be submitted electronically and will remain confidential (via the A3ES Information System, if applicable).

## ***SITE VISIT***

### *Logistics*

The site visit is typically conducted at one location (usually the coordinating HEI), although other locations may be considered through a hybrid methodology. The visit generally lasts one day and is preceded by a preparatory meeting of the external review panel. The working language for the site visit will be English.

The experts' panel, through the A3ES project coordinator, will propose a schedule and format for the visit, identifying the dates and the group of participants. This proposal should be communicated at least four weeks in advance (this period can be adjusted, if necessary). At least 15 days prior to the visit, the consortium must confirm the acceptance of the proposed date and identify the participants. Should adjustments be necessary, the panel may request amendments.

Given the logistical complexity of organizing the site visit, the consortium is advised to begin preparations well in advance. For assistance with this organization, it is possible and recommended to maintain contact with the A3ES project coordinator.

### *Participants*

During the site visit, the review panel will meet with various representatives, including management, academic and non-academic staff, and students from the consortium institutions.

To facilitate communication between the experts' panel and all participants, relevant information—such as the profiles of the panel members, the context and purpose of the visit, and, most importantly, the Self-Evaluation Report (SER)—should be shared in advance.

If simultaneous translation is required for any participants during the site visit, it is the responsibility of the coordinating institution to arrange this service on behalf of the cooperating institutions.

### *Conduct of the site visit*

The site visit will consist of several meetings with different academic stakeholders. To ensure efficiency, it is important to guarantee, on the one hand, the presence of a sufficient and diverse number of participants, and on the other hand, the opportunity for their contributions to the discussions. Ideally, there should be 8-10 attendees at each meeting (this number can be adjusted as necessary).

Both the review panel and the institutions are encouraged to foster an atmosphere of genuine dialogue throughout the main review visit. To this end, questions and discussions during the meetings will be conducted in a fair, courteous, and constructive manner, aiming to clarify doubts or concerns and assess the provided evidence.

The A3ES project coordinator will participate in the site visit to support the review panel and ensure the smooth execution of the process.

### *Oral Report*

The oral report marks the formal conclusion of the site visit. It is presented by the chair at the end of the visit and provides a brief overview of the review panel's findings. This report offers the chair an opportunity to share the preliminary conclusions of the panel regarding the joint programme and its compliance with the established standards.

The oral report is not a forum for further discussions; it serves as the formal closure of the site visit. Under no circumstances will a final decision be made during this session.

### *Review Panel Report*

A review report must be prepared by the expert panel. This report should contain relevant evidence, analysis, and conclusions regarding the standards outlined in section 3. The panel's report may also include recommendations for further development of the joint programme. The conclusions and recommendations should specifically address the distinctive features of the joint programme.

As with other national assessment procedures, institutions will have the opportunity to comment on the panel's review report and request the correction of factual errors (based on solid arguments) in their institutional response. This institutional response cannot be used to introduce new facts or information regarding the joint programme under assessment; it is intended solely for clarifying initial questions or correcting factual inaccuracies. There is no specific template for this response, and, like other information, it must be submitted electronically and treated as confidential.

After the submission of the institutional response (if applicable), and considering its content, the panel will finalize the report.

Once the final report has been agreed upon and finalized by the panel, the Chair will submit it to A3ES. This submission must occur within four weeks following the site visit (alternative timelines may be considered). A3ES maintains editorial rights over the report and will review it for consistency and the feasibility of the findings.

### *Formal outcomes and decision*

The outcome of the process will result in a panel report with a judgment of 'compliant', 'partially compliant' or 'not compliant' with respect to the standards, as specified in the European Approach.

The final panel report is submitted to the A3ES Management Board for approval and final decision. Following the decision of the Management Board, the coordinating higher education institution will be formally notified.

A3ES will publish the approved report on its website and notify DEQAR of the outcome.

When compliant, the accreditation will be granted for a period of six years, in accordance with European Approach guidelines. During this period, A3ES should be informed of any changes to the consortium offering the joint programme.

#### *Registration and Recognition*

Prior to the joint assessment process, all institutions involved in the consortium must ensure or be informed about the conditions for registration and recognition of the programme within their respective national higher education systems.

As previously mentioned, it is highly advisable to make prior contact with the respective National Agencies or other accreditation bodies to clarify these matters.

#### *Appeals*

The institutional consortium has the right to appeal against the formal outcome of the process. In this case, A3ES's appeals process will apply.

#### *Follow-up*

A follow-up procedure will be agreed upon between A3ES and the institutional consortium. This procedure will address the fulfilment of conditions and/or the implementation of follow-up actions on recommendations, if applicable.

#### *Periodic Review*

In accordance with the European Approach guidelines, the joint programme shall undergo a periodic review within a maximum of six years. This periodic review must be clearly specified in the published decision.

### **5.1.2. A3ES AS A PARTNER /OBSERVER AGENCY**

The role of A3ES as a partner/observer agency on the European Approach quality assurance procedure should be the one stated in the commitment expression (chapter 4.1.2.).

Through this expression, A3ES commits to:

- Provide clear information about the necessary complementary procedures for recognition and registration of the joint programme in the Portuguese Higher Education system;
- Designate a project coordinator to follow and monitor the assessment procedure;
- To maintain regular contact with the leading Agency, providing all the necessary information and documentation for clarifying and easing the assessment process;



- To be involved in all activities/meetings linked with the assessment process;
- To guide and support the national institutions of the consortium on the internal necessary validation, accreditation and recognition procedures;
- To accept the assessment outcomes from the leading Agency;
- To publish the accreditation result, for public awareness;
- To follow-up the process.

A3ES's participation in the assessment process will be ensured by a project coordinator. Additionally, this project coordinator will assist and support the national institutions of the consortium with the necessary internal procedures for the validation and registration of the programme in their respective national higher education systems.

### 5.1.3. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PROCEDURE

A fee is associated with this procedure, as defined by [A3ES Management Board Deliberation n° 141/2025](#).

Notwithstanding the value of the accreditation decision for A3ES's internal procedures, the national registration and recognition of the international joint programme require an additional procedural step. Therefore, the joint programme must be submitted as a new Study Programme (NCE), by completing *specific sections* of the "Prior Accreditation of New Study Programmes Report." Guidelines for this procedure are provided by the project coordinator.

## 5.2. OTHER PROCEDURES OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

Other approaches to the quality assessment of joint international programmes may be applied by A3ES. In accordance with [Decree-Law n° 65/2018, of 16 August](#) and [Decree-Law n° 27/2021, of 16 April](#), A3ES is authorized to validate and incorporate the results of assessment procedures conducted by other EQAR-registered agencies into its own processes.

This legal framework is reflected in the updated version of the [A3ES Management Board Deliberation No. 474/2023, dated 8 May](#), which defines the necessary documentation to be provided as valid evidence. To address this, A3ES has established three distinct scenarios, each with corresponding documentation requirements:

1. The EQAR responsible Agency develops study programmes assessment/accreditation procedures

*The consortium coordination HEI must provide evidence about the Joint programme accreditation by submitting a formal declaration by the responsible Agency, stating the accreditation of the programme.*

2. The EQAR responsible Agency establishes and implement only institutional assessment/accreditation procedures (in Members-States where the self-awarding powers are in place)

*The consortium coordination HEI must provide evidence about:*

- i) *the institutional accreditation, by submitting a formal declaration by the responsible Agency,*
- ii) *the joint programme accreditation, by submitting a formal declaration stating that the joint degree is accredited.*

3. The EQAR responsible Agency establishes and implement only institutional auditing procedures

*The consortium coordination HEI must provide evidence about:*

- i) *the positive results of the institutional auditing process by submitting a formal declaration by the responsible Agency,*
- ii) *the joint programme accreditation, by submitting a formal declaration stating that the joint degree is accredited.*

In all cases, it is mandatory to provide evidence of the joint programme accreditation, clearly identifying all the HEI partners in the consortium.

Furthermore, in these three procedures, for national registration and recognition purposes, the joint programme must be submitted to A3ES as a new study programme (NCE) by fully completing the “Prior Accreditation of New Study Programmes Report.”

As in the EA procedures, there is a fee is associated with this procedure, as defined by [A3ES Management Board Deliberation n° 141/2025](#).

## 6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The quality assurance of joint international programmes is embedded in a dynamic and evolving European context. The procedures described in this document reflect A3ES's commitment to upholding the principles of the European Higher Education Area, ensuring coherence, transparency, and mutual trust among participating institutions and countries.

Given the diversity of joint programme structures and institutional contexts, it is important to emphasize that a uniform approach may not always be suitable. A3ES is committed to working constructively with national higher education institutions to identify the most appropriate assessment pathways within the established European framework. In this context, the Agency values continuous dialogue with institutions as a means to clarify expectations, understand specific institutional contexts, and offer guidance that is both rigorous and context-sensitive.

A3ES supports the implementation of joint programme accreditation procedures by offering clear and objective information and by aligning national requirements with European guidelines where relevant. The Agency recognises the particular challenges of transnational education and remains open to engaging with institutions to explore viable and high-quality solutions in line with shared standards.

For institutions planning or implementing joint programmes, early contact with A3ES is strongly recommended. This engagement enables timely identification of potential issues and ensures that institutions are well informed about the procedural requirements and expectations.

In summary, A3ES is committed to working alongside institutions to ensure that joint programme accreditation processes are consistent, well-informed, and responsive to both national and European quality assurance standards.

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