

vlhr

**Manual for the European Approach for Quality
Assurance of Joint Programmes**

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General Introduction

Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. They offer a genuine European learning experience to students. Joint degrees express the “jointness” also in the awarding of the degree.

The present European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. In particular, it will:

- dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes by setting standards for these programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria, and
- facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes that genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

The EHEA is characterised by a diversity of approaches to external QA, including accreditation, evaluation or audit at the level of study programmes and/or institutions. While responding to the needs and requirements of their respective context, these different approaches find their “common denominator” in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The ESG apply to quality assurance procedures of joint programmes as to all other types of programmes. Thus, the European Approach is mainly based on the ESG and on the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). In addition, the European Approach takes into account the distinctive features of a joint programme and, thus, specifies the ‘standard’ approach accordingly.

“Joint programmes” are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries¹, and leading to double/multiple degrees² or a joint degree³.

¹ This proposal relates only to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries, and does not address the quality assurance of programmes delivered jointly by different institutions from a single country.

² Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

³ A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.

This document describes the assessment protocol used by VLUHR QAU, the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Higher Education Council. The manual is intended for use by both the programmes and institutions involved as well as for the assessment panels.

The outline structure of this manual follows main phases of the assessment process: Writing the Self evaluation report (chapter 1) and selecting the assessment panel (chapter 2), followed by the actual assessment by the assessment panel (chapter 3).

Chapter 1 Self evaluation report

1.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In order to permit a robust assessment of the programme, the required information about the programme is gathered before the on site visit by the panel, in the form of a brief, critical self evaluation report (SER).

The SER has a dual purpose:

- on the one hand it serves as a primary information source for the panel in preparing for the on site visit, during its interviews with the stakeholders and when assessing the programme;
- the process of preparing for and writing the SER is also intended to stimulate internal consultation within the programme and thus its own internal quality assurance.

1.2. GENERAL STRUCTURE

VLUHR QAU organises an information meeting for all partners of the joint programme, preferably one year before the final submission date. More detailed information is provided at this meeting on the structure and progress of a programme assessment. This meeting also includes a detailed discussion of the internal review and the specificities of the programme and the specificities of the national higher education systems.

An SER is preferably a maximum of 25,000 words in length, including the introduction and excluding appendices.

The report must be printed and submitted to the VLUHR QUA. An electronic, editable version must be sent to the project manager / secretary of VLUHR QAU no later than 3 months before the site visit.

1.3. CONTENT

The external quality assurance procedure should be based on a self- evaluation report (SER) jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions. The SER should contain comprehensive information that demonstrates the compliance of the programme with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA.

In addition, the report should contain the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that foreign

agencies and experts might need in order to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems.

The SER should focus explicitly on the distinctive feature of the joint programme as a joint endeavour of higher education institutions from more than one national higher education system.

The SER is a document that stands alone and can be read independently. The SER is deemed to be the result of a process of **joint consultation** and must offer a **critical, analytical** and **future-oriented reflection on the programme as a whole**.

The standards and the associated criteria from the assessment framework are set out below. For each standard, the SER must demonstrate how and to what extent the programme considers that it meets the requirement.

The SER also includes an introduction and a conclusion.

The introduction always deals with the way in which the SER was produced. It addresses the allocation of tasks and the contributions of those involved. The organisational and historical aspects of the programme are also outlined, highlighting the vision of the specific character of the programme.

The conclusion summarises the most important strengths of the programme, points for attention and fundamental future policy options and ambitions of the programme.

1.4. STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

1. Eligibility

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.

1.2 Joint design and delivery

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

1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:

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

2. Learning Outcomes

2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

2.2 Disciplinary field

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

2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

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

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 taken into account.

3. Study Programme [ESG 1.2]

3.1 Curriculum

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

3.2 Credits

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

3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 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 there is no credit range specified.

The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]

4.1. Admission

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

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.

5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]

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.

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.

6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]

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

7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

7.1 Staff

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

7.2 Facilities

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

8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

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.

Chapter 2 Assessment panel

2.1. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THE PANEL

1. The assessment panel is composed of at least 4 members. The panel as a whole must have the following expertise:
 - a) *Subject expertise* focusing on developments in the discipline. A subject specialist is or has been engaged in providing teaching on an identical or related programme with the same orientation and contributes to the development of professional practice, the discipline or the subject area;
 - b) *International expertise* is represented on the assessment panel if the panel is capable of comparing the content of the programme with related programmes with the same orientation and at the same level in other countries and if the assessment panel has insight into the demands placed on graduates in the national and international professional context. This last form of international expertise is important in the case of programmes that have a 'civil effect' (i.e. which confer access to specific professions) and is a compulsory element in programmes that offer preparation for work in an international context;
 - c) *Professional expertise* is essential in the case of programmes with a professional orientation. The professional expert has a good overview of the demands that are placed on graduates in the professional context, for example through his involvement in umbrella organisations or through holding a leadership position with a major or distinctive employer;
 - d) *Educational expertise* refers to recent experiences with delivering and developing teaching at the relevant educational level for the programme, and expertise in relation to the (types of) teaching provided by the programme.
 - e) The term *student-related expertise* is applicable up to 1 year after graduation (Bachelor's or Master's) at the time when the assessment panel is proposed to the Quality Assurance Board.
 - f) *Assessment or audit expertise* should be in the area of higher education.

A combination of these types of expertise should be represented on the assessment panel.

Through their international expertise and experience the panel should be able to take into account the distinctive features of the joint programme. Collectively, the panel should possess knowledge of the HE systems of the HEIs involved and the

language(s) of instruction used. The panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme.

2. Every panel member meets the independence requirements (see Appendix 4.1). The panel members sign an independence and confidentiality declaration.
3. Every panel member signs the ethical code of conduct (see Appendix 4.2.).
4. Every panel member has an active knowledge of the language in which the assessment is carried out.
5. The panel is assisted by a secretary, who is assigned by the VLUHR QAU. The secretary is not a member of the panel.

The following additional criteria also apply to the student member:

1. should preferably study in a similar study programme as the joint programme under review
2. at the time when the assessment panel is set up (preparatory meeting), should have acquired a minimum of 30 credits on a programme;
3. should preferably have relevant experience of participation bodies, either within a programme or within an institution.

2.2. SELECTION PROCEDURE

To guarantee the authority, independence and expertise of the panel, a procedure has been developed whereby different bodies make an active contribution to the process independently of each other. The programmes to be assessed propose candidates, the independent Quality Assurance Unit of the VLUHR investigates the proposals and either does or does not approve them. If required, before making a final decision on the composition of the assessment panel, the assessment body submits the proposal to the accreditation agency for an opinion.

2.2.1. *Proposal of candidates*

The coordinating institution appoints a contact person at programme level. The contact person is asked, after consultation of all partners in the programme, to present candidates in accordance with the criteria and stipulations set out under § 2.1.

The proposal consists of a list of names of possible candidate members and a list of possible candidate chairs. A completed CV form is supplied for each candidate⁴. Candidates for whom no CV form is provided are not included in the remainder of the procedure.

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2.2.2. Approval of the proposal for the chair and list of candidate members

The proposal for the chair, consisting of at least two names in order of preference, and the list of candidate members and student members, is then submitted for approval to the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR, which checks whether the criteria for the selection of the assessment panel were met.

After approval by the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR, a letter is written to the proposed candidate chair to ask whether he/she is willing to chair the assessment panel. He/she is also asked to sign the statement of independence. If the first-ranked candidate chair does not accept the position, the next candidate chair is approached. If the list is exhausted, a new proposal for the chair of the assessment panel must be made according to the procedure described above.

2.2.3. Further selection

The approval by the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR authorises the chair to work out a proposal for the further selection of the assessment panel, in consultation with the VLUHR QAU, using the approved list of candidate members and student members. The chair of the assessment panel may propose additional candidate members and candidate student members. If applicable the programmes are informed of this.

The proposal for further selection of the panel consists of at least two or three separate lists (one or two for the candidate members and one for the student members) in which a single actual candidate is indicated in each case, and possible reserve candidates are ranked in order of preference.

2.2.4. Approval of proposal for further selection

The proposal for further selection is submitted for approval to the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR, which checks whether the criteria for selection of the assessment panel were complied with.

After approval by the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR, a letter is written to the proposed candidate members to ask whether they are willing to sit on the assessment panel. They are also asked to sign the statement of independence. If an actual candidate member does not accept the position, the reserve candidates are approached in order of preference. If the list of candidate members is exhausted, the programmes are consulted again. The selection of the assessment panel is then submitted to the accreditation agency for an opinion.

2.2.5. Preparatory of the assessment panel

As a final step, the assessment panel is inaugurated by a resolution of the Quality Assurance Board of the VLUHR. The preparatory decision is submitted to:

- chair and members of the assessment panel
- contact persons for the programmes / institutions involved

2.2.6. Project manager / secretary of the panel

The panel is supported throughout the process by a project manager who is responsible for preparing the content and practical aspects as well as the implementation of assessments, and for providing information about the assessment system to the programmes and assessment panels.

The project manager is responsible for ensuring that the assessment protocol is followed. The role of project manager is always carried out by a member of staff from the VLUHR QAU office.

For each on site visit a secretary is also appointed by the VLUHR QAU, who is responsible for preparing for and taking minutes during the meeting, and also for drafting and editing the programme report. The role of secretary is generally carried out by the project manager. For organisational reasons it is possible to deviate from this rule. The secretary is not a member of the assessment panel. After the assessment process has been completed, the secretary signs a declaration confirming that the report has been produced completely independently.

2.3. MISSION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The review panel, supported by the secretary, should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards. As well as stating opinions, the panel is also expected to issue constructive recommendations on making quality improvements where possible. In doing this the panel must take into account the context of the programme and the feasibility of the recommendations. Recommendations are formulated in the most concrete way possible and summarised in a separate list at the end of each programme report. In this way the report contains recommendations for developing the programme further.

For each standard the panel expresses a considered and substantiated opinion, according to a three-point scale: fully compliant, partially compliant or non-compliant. The opinions are supported by facts and analyses as far as possible and make use of illustrative and representative examples where possible. The panel must make it clear how it has reached its opinion, taking into account the

(criteria of the) standards. In case the review results in a formal outcome the review panel should make a recommendation for the accreditation decision. The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The rules set out below are applicable to each standard.

Compliant

The programme acts in accordance with the standard, and its implementation is effective.

Partially Compliant

Some aspects or parts of the standard are met while others are not. The interpretation of the standard is correct, but the manner of implementation is not effective enough.

Non-Compliant

The programme fails to comply with the standard.

Chapter 3 Assessment process

After a **preparatory phase** in which the programme involved produce their SER and the assessment panel is selected, the **preparatory meeting** is held for the panel and the **on site visits** take place. The assessment process ends with the publication of an **assessment report**.

3.1. PREPARATORY MEETING

At the preparatory meeting, which precedes the on site visits by the panel to the programme to be assessed, the assessment panel is formally inaugurated. The meeting serves as the first opportunity for the panel members to get to know each other, to receive further explanations about the assessment process and to prepare for the activities.

Preferably one month before this meeting / training, VLUHR QAU submits the SER for the programme involved to the panel members.

3.1.1. Providing information to the assessment panel

At the preparatory meeting, the panel members are given more detailed explanations on the assessment system and the practical details of how the assessment process takes place. At this time they are also instructed on the approach to be followed and the working method.

3.1.2. Preparation for the on site visit

At the preparatory meeting, the draft visit schedules are discussed and practical arrangements are made for the possible allocation of tasks within the assessment panel.

The panel also goes through the assessment form, which expresses the assessment framework in operational terms and contains the standards on which the panel has to form an opinion. It is explained that the assessment form is an internal, confidential document, in which the panel has to make explicit its opinions on the various standards and which will serve as a basis when writing the assessment report.

A first substantive discussion also takes place during the preparatory meeting in relation to the SER. The intention is to formulate specific questions and points for attention within the panel, which will then be addressed during the on site visit.

3.2. ON SITE VISIT

The site visit should enable the review panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and assess whether the programme complies with the Standards. The on site visit to a programme in principle takes one day, preceded by a preparatory internal consultation process within the panel.

The schedules for the on site visits should preferably be made available to the programme involved at least one month prior to the visit. At a preparatory discussion with the programme, the visit schedule is explained and practical arrangements are agreed for the on site visit. If, for any reason, further amendments to the visit schedule are proposed, these must be approved by the chair. The list of interview participants and the practical information are sent to the project manager to the programme at least one week before the on site visit.

The site visit should therefore include discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions and in particular the management of the institutions and the programme, the staff, the students, and other relevant stakeholders, such as alumni and the professional field.

After these discussions a consultation is held. It gives students and members of staff the opportunity to speak to the panel individually or in groups should they wish. The panel may itself also invite individuals to the consultation. The programme is asked to publicise the consultation widely so that everyone within the programme is aware of it. Registrations for the consultation are made directly with the project manager / secretary of the assessment panel during the visit.

After the final interview, the panel withdraws to discuss its opinion based on the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA. Every panel member first individually completes the assessment form that he/she received at the beginning of the on-site visit from the project manager/secretary. Afterwards the panel jointly confirms its arguments and opinions. The panel members are expected to submit the completed individual assessment form to the project manager/secretary of the panel at the end of the on site visit.

The on site visit by the panel is concluded with a verbal reporting session in which the panel sets out its initial provisional conclusions and recommendations without indicating the scores.

Although the site visit should normally be restricted to one location, the provision at all locations has to be taken into account.

Additional information or documents provided to the assessment panel after the on site visit can no longer be taken into account in the assessment, unless the panel has explicitly requested additional information during the visit. If appropriate the panel must state arguments for its request and the information requested must reach the project manager within five working days after the on site visit.

Programmes are given the opportunity to withdraw from the assessment procedure during the assessment process, under the following conditions:

- if a programme is being discontinued and the programme is being removed from the Higher Education Register;
- notice that the programme wishes to withdraw must be given to the Quality Assurance Board no later than 14 days after the on site visit by the assessment panel;
- the formal decision by the institution, confirming that the programme is being discontinued must be submitted to the Quality Assurance Board no later than one month after the visit by the assessment panel;
- the entire cost of the assessment is borne by the programme/institution.

3.3. REPORTING

The review panel should prepare a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards. The project manager/secretary of the panel writes the draft programme report. This report consist preferably of a maximum of 20 pages and a maximum of 8,000 words, excluding appendices.

The report should also contain recommendations for developing the programme further. In case the review results in a formal outcome the review panel should make a recommendation for the decision. The conclusions and recommendations should pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The draft programme report is presented to the panel members and discussed and confirmed. After approval by the panel, the draft programme report is sent under embargo to the programme and institutions involved for feedback. The institutions should have the opportunity to comment on a draft version of the review report, to request correction of factual errors and to comment on the content. The responses from the programme are submitted to the (project manager of the) assessment panel with the consent of the institution's board, a maximum of three weeks after receipt of the draft programme report.

Subsequently, the assessment panel discusses the response from the programme/institution on the draft programme report, after which it definitively confirms the programme reports. At this time the panel also drafts written notes in which it indicates how it addressed the comments made by the programme/institution. The panel is autonomous in its decision on whether or not to take the comments from the programme/institution into account. Factual mistakes are altered in all cases.

After approval by the panel the programme report, amended if applicable, and the notes indicating how the panel dealt with the comments from the programme/institution, are sent under embargo to the programmes and institutions involved.

If a programme/institution is not satisfied with the way in which the panel took the comments into account, and if the programme/institution considers it necessary, a response from the institution - which must be submitted within three weeks - may be included as an appendix to the final report. All the responses are gathered into a file within the VLUHR QAU.

At the time of the second feedback round, the programme/institution may also file an appeal against the programme report. To that end it may file a complaint in accordance with the 'regulations for the internal assessment report appeals procedure' which is enclosed as Appendix 4.3. If the internal appeals procedure is used, this will be stated in the assessment report.

The draft text will be under embargo until final publication of the assessment report. This does not mean that the institution/programme cannot adapt its policy in accordance with any recommendations from the assessment panel before the process is completed. The institutions/programmes are requested, however, pending publication, not to cite the report in published documents or to publish parts of it or of the draft report in their entirety.

3.4 PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL REPORT

As a final step in the assessment process, the final report is prepared for press and then published. In case the review was not conducted in English at least an English summary of the review report and an English version of the decision, including its reasons, should be published.

The following appendices must be included in the assessment report:

- curricula vitae of the panel members;
- the visit schedules

The assessment report, which is clearly dated, is placed on the website of the VLUHR QAU so as to make it accessible to the public. The publication date serves as a reference date for the subsequent accreditation request.

3.5. ACCREDITATION

If required, an accreditation agency should take a decision on the basis of the review report and the recommendation for the decision, considering the comments by the higher education institutions as appropriate. In case the review results in an accreditation decision, it grants or denies the accreditation (with or without conditions), based on the Standards.

The accreditation agency should give reasons for its accreditation decision. This applies in particular for accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions and for cases where the decision differs from the review panel's conclusions and recommendation for the decision.

3.6. FOLLOW-UP

The agency should agree with the cooperating institutions a follow-up procedure to assess the fulfilment of conditions - if applicable - and/or to evaluate the follow-up actions on recommendations - if applicable.

3.7. PERIODICITY

The joint programme should be reviewed periodically every 6 years, which should be specified in the published decision. If there is an accreditation decision it should be granted - if the decision is positive - for a period of 6 years. During the 6-year period, the agency should be informed about changes in the consortium offering the joint programme.

Chapter 4

Appendices

- Appendix 4.1. Independence requirements for assessment panels
- Appendix 4.2. Ethical code and code of conduct for members of the assessment panel
- Appendix 4.3. Regulations for the internal assessment report appeals procedure

Appendix 4.1.

Independence requirements for assessment panels

The following cannot be appointed as chair or member of the assessment panel:

- 1° Individuals who, at the time of selection of the assessment panel or during a period of five years prior to this, are or have been a member of staff at the institution/one of the institutions to be assessed.
A member of staff of an institution is defined as:
 - Individuals who are employed in the institution on a tenured, untenured basis or on the basis of a contract of employment;
 - Other academic staff and grant recipients working within the institution, regardless of the nature of the employment or the origin of their remuneration;
- 2° Individuals who, at the time of selection of the assessment panel or during a period of five years prior to this, were members of a central governing body of the institution providing the programme or one of the programmes to be assessed, of the hospital associated with the institution in question or of the association to which the institution belongs;
- 3° Individuals who, at the time of selection of the assessment panel or during a period of five years prior to this, without being members of staff of the institution providing the programme or one of the programmes to be assessed, is providing or has provided advice or is carrying out or has carried out assignments for the institution or is regularly involved or has been regularly involved in organising or assessing courses for the programme / one of the programmes to be assessed;
- 4° Individuals who, at the time of selection of the assessment panel, are married to or cohabiting with a person in one of the categories referred to under 1°, 2° and 3°, and blood relatives up to the second degree of kinship of the persons referred to under 1°, 2° and 3°.

With the exception of the chair of the assessment panel, exceptions to the aforementioned disqualifications may be made if this is considered to be justified due to the difficulty of otherwise selecting an assessment panel that adequately meets the requirements of expertise, independence and authority. In such cases the reasons for making the exception are stated in the proposal and in the appointment decision. It is also stated what limitations, if applicable, are imposed on participation by the member in question in the

activities of the panel. An exception from the aforementioned disqualifications is not granted for 1° individuals who, at the time of selection of the assessment panel or during a period of five years prior to this, are or have been a member of staff at the institution/one of the institutions to be assessed.

Appendix 4.2.

Ethical code and code of conduct for members of the assessment panel

- 1 A panel member respects the mission of the institution and the programme to be assessed. A panel member is aware of his or her role and carries out that role with the greatest **respect** for all his or her discussion partners.
- 2 A panel member must not be guided or influenced in the formation of his/her **opinion** by persons or parties involved with the institution or the programme to be assessed, or by other interested parties. A panel member **speaks on the basis of his or her own expertise** and on his or her own behalf and **does not represent the opinion of any organisation** of which the panel member may be a member.
- 3 A panel member must, when assessing quality, be able to distance himself or herself **sufficiently from personal ideas, convictions or preferences** in relation to the field or discipline being assessed.
- 4 A panel member must form his/her **opinion in accordance with the VLUHR Manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**.
When a panel has to assess multiple programmes, these frameworks and the assessment criteria comprised within them shall be applied in a uniform way to all the programmes.
- 5 A panel member **bases his or her opinion on** the following information:
 - the SER produced by the programme together with the associated appendices and documentation;
 - any additional information provided at the request of the panel;
 - the interviews conducted in the context of the on site visit;
 - the observations made during on site visits;
 - the discipline-specific framework of learning outcomes defined by the programmes.
 - research carried out by the panel using other public information (e.g. websites)
- 6 The **assessment** by a panel member must **satisfy the following quality requirements**:
 - expertise and professionalism;

- independence and objectivity;
 - due care and consistency;
 - transparency and freedom from prejudice/impartiality.
- 7 A panel member **does not use information** gathered in the context of the assessment and evaluation process for personal or professional purposes. All information is treated as **confidential**.
 - 8 A panel member **does not accept any gifts or rewards** from a programme to be assessed or from an institution involved in the assessment.
 - 9 A panel member **has no financial or commercial interests** in the programme, the institution or the hospital associated with the institution which is to be assessed, nor in the association to which the institution belongs.
 - 10 A panel member is aware of the complexity of planning the timetable for the assessment process and the on site visits and for the various players involved and will therefore, except in cases of force majeure, **make every effort to keep to all commitments that are made** in terms of timing, attendance, duties as a panel member etc.

Appendix 4.3.

Regulations for the internal assessment report appeals procedure

ARTICLE 1.

An internal appeals committee for external review reports shall be set up within VLUHR, referred to hereinafter as the 'appeals committee'.

The appeals committee shall rule on the appeals filed by institutions against study programme reports after the second feedback round.

ARTICLE 2. COMPOSITION

The appeals committee shall consist of an acting chair and a deputy chair; two acting assessors and two deputy assessors.

They shall be appointed by the VLUHR QA Board on a proposal from the VLUHR QA, for a renewable period of 3 years.

The chair shall have expertise in educational and/or administrative law. The assessors shall have expertise in educational assessment.

The VLUHR QA Board shall appoint a permanent secretary and a deputy.

ARTICLE 3. POWERS

The appeals committee shall rule on the admissibility of appeals. It shall judge whether the appeal is well founded on the basis of

- 1° the implementation within a specific external review of the relevant legislative and regulatory stipulations and the procedures described in the current 'VLUHR Manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes;

2° the general administrative principles.

The appeals committee shall not comment on the quality of the externally reviewed study programmes.

ARTICLE 4. FILING AND REGISTERING THE APPEAL

§ 1. The boards of all institutions involved that do not agree with a score of non-compliance on one of the standards or a negative accreditation recommendation in a study programme report after the second feedback round, may file an appeal against it to the appeals committee within a deadline of fifteen calendar days from the day after receipt of the study programme report, second feedback, sent electronically or by post. The statement of appeal shall be sent by registered letter or delivered by hand with acknowledgement of receipt, to the secretariat of the appeals committee. The date of posting or the date shown on the acknowledgement of receipt shall count as the date of the statement of appeal.

§ 2. The statement of appeal shall include the following details:

1° the names, addresses, telephone numbers of the institution's boards;

2° the date and signature of the Chief Executives or Principals;

3° the title of the study programme report after the second feedback round to which the statement of appeal relates;

4° at least a factual description of the objections that are made. The institution's board shall enclose with the statement of appeal the supporting documentation which it considers necessary. The institution's board shall gather the documents together and provide a document list.

§ 3. Each statement of appeal shall be entered in a register by the secretariat of the appeals committee. A copy of the statement of appeal shall be submitted to the members of the internal appeals committee and to the chair of the review panel concerned.

ARTICLE 5.ASSESSMENT AND NOTIFICATION OF ADMISSIBILITY

§ 1. The appeal shall not be admissible if the institution's board has not, after the first feedback round, made use of the opportunity to submit its objections to the review panel in accordance with 3.3. of the Manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The statement of appeal shall be admissible if it

1° has been submitted within the stated period; and

2° includes, as a minimum, the information referred to in article 4, § 2 of these regulations.

§ 2. The secretariat of the appeals committee shall investigate the admissibility of the appeal and submit its findings to the appeals committee.

If the appeals committee finds a statement of appeal to be inadmissible, it shall inform the institution's board of this by registered letter or by hand with acknowledgment of receipt, within a deadline of 15 calendar days starting on the day after receipt of the statement of appeal. The appeals procedure will thereby be terminated.

§ 3. The institution's board may, during the period for submission of the appeal as stipulated in article 4 §1, submit a new statement of appeal which expressly withdraws the earlier statement of appeal.

§ 4. If a statement of appeal is admissible, the appeals committee shall inform the institution's board and the chair of the review panel in question of this without delay and shall instigate an investigation into the grounds for the appeal.

ARTICLE 6. INVESTIGATION OF THE GROUNDS

The appeals committee may request additional information, indicating the deadline by which the information must be submitted.

It may call the parties to attend a joint consultation, the venue and time for which it shall determine. The review panel shall be represented by its chair and/or by the members delegated by the review panel.

ARTICLE 7. DECISION

§ 1. The appeals committee shall inform the institution's board and the chair of the review panel in question of its decision, stating reasons, by registered letter or by hand with acknowledgement of receipt, within a deadline of 20 calendar days beginning on the day after the statement of appeal was received.

§ 2. The appeals committee may

1° decide that the appeal is unfounded; the study programme report will remain unchanged;

2° decide that the review panel must take into consideration certain changes in the study programme report, for example providing clearer justification for a judgement;

3° decide that certain parts of the external review must be repeated, in accordance with the stipulations and general principles set out in article three of these regulations. The appeals committee may require a return visit for this purpose. The return visit shall generally be carried out by the chair of the review panel and at least 2 members of the review panel, assisted by a staff member from the VLUHR QA. The appeals committee may decide that the return visit is to be carried out by a newly constituted panel.

§ 3. The review panel shall set down the result of its new external review and discussions, resulting from the decision of the appeals committee as stated in art. 7 §2. 2° and 3°, in a report which will, if applicable, result in an amended study programme report after the second feedback round. The assessment panel shall submit the report and the study programme report after the second feedback round, with amendments if applicable, to the VLUHR QA, which shall carry out the subsequent follow-up.

ARTICLE 8. COSTS

For an appeal submitted to the internal appeals committee as stipulated in article 2, a non-refundable administrative charge of 700 euros per statement of appeal will be made to the institution's board.

ARTICLE 9. INTERNAL REGULATIONS

The appeals committee shall draft internal regulations.

ARTICLE 10. END OF A DEADLINE PERIOD

If the last day of a deadline period falls on a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday, the period shall be extended until the next working day when post offices are open.

ARTICLE 11.

These regulations shall come into force on 12 June 2018