Manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

January 2020

General Introduction

This manual describes the methods and practices used by VLUHR QA for the European approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This manual is intended for use by the programmes and the institutions involved as well as by the panels.

The outline structure of this manual follows the main phases of the review process: The preparatory phase (chapter 1), writing the self-evaluation report (chapter 2), selecting the review panel (chapter 3), followed by the actual review by the review panel (chapter 4).

About VLUHR QA

VLUHR QA is an autonomous quality assurance agency active among other things in the field of programme review in higher education. VLUHR QA is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, (www.eqar.eu). As such, it complies with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).[1]

VLUHR QA stands for independence and transparency, extensive expertise and experience, with respect to the specificity of the programs and institutions involved and with a focus on the improvement of the quality of higher education. In accordance with its mission and vision, VLUHR QA is a center of expertise in the development of a quality culture in higher education.

VLUHR QA is a recognised and respected partner in the coordination of programme reviews. VLUHR QA places a strong emphasis on the robustness of the whole review process. To do so, it provides a manual with a template, a clear procedure for the selection of panel members, standardised training for panel members, a well-established site visit format and clear reports that underpin the findings, judgements and recommendations.

VLUHR QA is not an accreditation body. This allows it to approach reviews in a flexible manner. VLUHR QA emphasises a tailor-made approach, wherein the uniqueness of the programme and the institution is central and where the demands of the national accreditation agencies are dealt with. VLUHR QA's project managers are the points of contact for the programmes and institutions. The project managers ensure a thorough preparation of the process, involving and respecting the ownership of all programmes and institutions. The project managers also act as secretaries.

VLUHR QA is managed by its own board. This QA Board is made up of international quality assurance experts who guarantee the quality of the programme review carried out. VLUHR QA is based in the center of Brussels, in the heart of Europe. The location is easily accessible, which creates opportunities to coordinate a programme review across many countries.

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[1]   https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=45

An introduction to the European approach

"Joint programmes" are understood as an integrated curriculum, coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries [2] , and leading to double/multiple degrees [3] or a joint degree[4].

Joint programmes 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 students a genuine European learning experience. Joint degrees express the "jointness" in the awarding of the degree as well.

The joint programmes should be reviewed periodically every 6 years. If there is an accreditation decision, it should be granted – if the decision is positive – for a period of 6 years.

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

- dismantle an important obstacle to the development of joint programmes by setting standards for the programmes that are based on the agreed tools of the European Higher Education Area (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 contexts, 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. Therefore, 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.

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[2] 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.

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

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

Chapter 1   Preparatory Phase

The preparation of the review procedure starts as soon as VLUHR QA receives a written application from the institution offering the programme to be assessed. In the case of a review for the purpose of accreditation, the institution should preferably submit the application 18 months before the end of the current accreditation.

As soon as the application has been received, VLUHR QA will organise an information meeting during which the set-up and the course of the programme review will be explained in more detail. During this meeting there is a detailed discussion on the framework for programme accreditation, the composition of the panel, the self-evaluation to be carried out and the specific details of the programme. The programme is expected to provide basic administrative and legal details. For this purpose, the programme can rely on the application form (see annex 1).

VLUHR QA is committed to a smooth review process first and attaches great importance to the transparent flow of information with all stakeholders. The programme will be assigned one contact person within VLUHR QA, who will act as project manager during the process. The project manager prepares the practical aspects of the review. He provides information about the review procedures to the programme and the panel. The project manager is responsible for ensuring that the manual is followed. The project manager also acts as a secretary and is therefore responsible for preparing the site visit and taking minutes during the meeting, as well as for drafting and publishing the programme report. The project manager is not a member of the review panel. The programme is expected to appoint a single contact person. This ensures a clear flow of communication.

The review procedure, from the first preparatory meeting until the publication of a public report, takes approximately one year. Two years after the publication of the report, a follow-up procedure takes place.
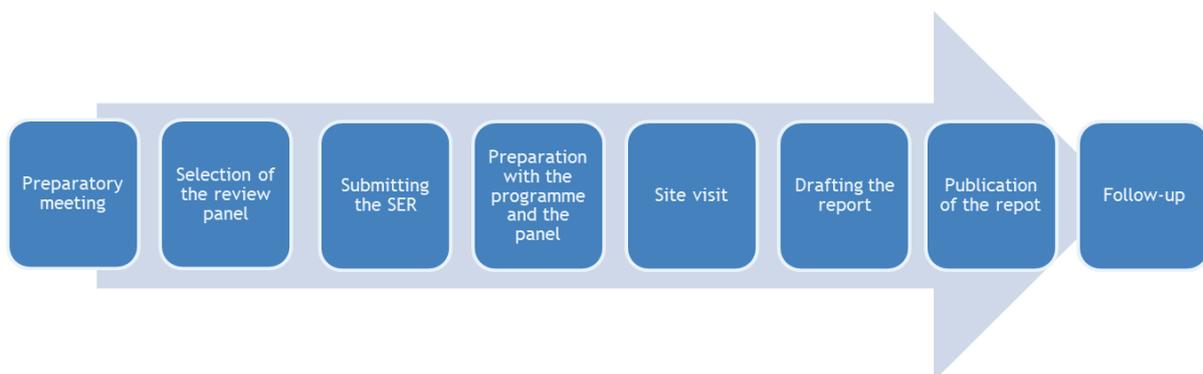
Chapter 2   Self-evaluation report

2.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In order to enable a thorough review of the programme, the necessary information about the programme is collected before the site visit by the panel, in the form of a critical self-evaluation report.

The self-evaluation report has a dual purpose:

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

The SER is jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions. The SER is deemed to be the result of a process of joint consultation. All stakeholders involved in the programme should play an active role in drafting the self-evaluation report.

The SER offers a critical, analytical and future-oriented reflection on the programme as a whole. Both strong and weak points are discussed for each standard. The discussion must not be limited to a list of facts but must clearly contain an analysis. The programme is also expected, when discussing the standards, to provide an explicit indication of the follow-up of the recommendations of the previous review panel, insofar as these are linked to the standards. How does the programme intend to address any bottlenecks and how does it intend to continue to develop itself in the future? The SER is intended to be a development-oriented instrument.

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.

2.2. GENERAL STRUCTURE

The SER is a document that stands alone and can be read independently.

The SER follows the standards and the associated criteria of the review framework, which are set out below. For each standard, the SER must demonstrate how and to what extent the programme considers that it meets the requirements. In demonstrating how the requirements are met, 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 also includes an introduction and a conclusion.

In addition, the SER contains the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that VLUHR QA, foreign accreditation agencies and the panel members might need in order to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems.

The programme may add appendices that provide insight into the content of the SER.

The SER is a document with no more than 20,000 words, excluding appendices, with a maximum of 30,000 words in case the SER deals with a bachelor programme and a subsequent master programme.

The length of the SER can be extended by 2,500 words per institution involved.

The SER must be submitted to VLUHR QA. An electronic, editable version of the SER must be submitted to VLUHR QA no later than 3 months before the site visit.

A self-evaluation report that does not comply with the stipulations mentioned above will be returned to the programme for revision. The revised report must be sent to VLUHR QA within 10 working days.

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

INTRODUCTION

The introduction always deals with the way 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

CONCLUSION

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

2.4. DECISION RULES QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

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   Review panel

3.1. MISSION OF THE REVIEW PANEL

The panel, supported by the project manager, prepares a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions regarding 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. This way, the report will contain recommendations to better develop the programme.

For each standard, the panel expresses a considered and substantiated opinion, according to a three-point scale: compliant, partially compliant or non-compliant. The opinions are supported by facts and analyses as much as possible and make use of illustrative and representative examples where possible. The panel makes it clear how it has reached its opinion, taking into account the (criteria of the) standards. Should the report result in a formal outcome, the panel makes a recommendation for the accreditation decision. The conclusions and recommendations pay particular attention to the distinctive features of the joint programme.

3.2. CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF THE PANEL

The above-mentioned mission of the panel stands or falls by the quality of the panel that will assess the programme(s). It is important that the review panel be established in such a way that a meaningful discussion can result between the panel and the programme. A panel must therefore be authoritative, independent and expert.

Authoritative

In order to bring about a constructive, substantial discussion between 'peers' and to ensure that the final review is supported by the programme, it is important for the panel to be composed of respected specialist peers who have acquired sufficient authority within the discipline. In order to guarantee this authoritative status, the programme is actively involved in the panel selection process. For the same reason, the presence of international experts is compulsory.

Independent

Since the review process has to be able to take place without influence from any interested party whatsoever, the panel is subject to strict requirements in terms of independence (annex 3). During the selection process, the independence of the individual panel members is explicitly checked and panel members expressly declare their independence by signing a declaration of independence before and after completing their duties as a panel member.

Expert

The expertise present on the review panel must encompass the entire subject area covered by the programme, must include insight into national and international developments in the discipline, must pay attention to the educational structure and internal quality assurance system of the programme and must have sufficient insight into the structure of higher education system in the involved countries.

The following criteria therefore apply to the selection of the panel:

- Subject-specific expertise is focused on the developments in the discipline. A subject-specific expert teaches or has taught within the same or a similar programme with the same orientation, and contributes to the development of the professional practice, the discipline or the field of study;

- International expertise is represented on the panel in order to enable it to verify whether the programme meets common international standards in terms of content, orientation, and level, and insofar as applicable, whether it meets the requirements that the international professional field sets for graduates;
- The professional field expert commands a good overview of the requirements that the professional field sets for graduates;
- Educational expertise refers to recent experience in teaching or educational development at the relevant programme level and to expertise regarding the education and learning/teaching formats provided by the programme;
- The term student-related expertise enables the panel to verify whether the programme is student-centred and safeguards the interests of students in such aspects as the information provision to students, student facilities, student counselling and guidance, and student participation. Preferably, student experts have experience as a student representative within a programme or institution. Studying a study programme similar to the joint programme under review is a plus;
- Evaluation expertise enables the panel to assess whether the programme is capable of assuring the quality of education;
- Country-specific expertise:
  i)   Collectively, the panel should possess knowledge of the HE systems of the HEIs involved and the language(s) of instruction used.
  ii) The panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme.

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

The panel members should still be active in their field of expertise when the panel is appointed. The student member in the panel must have graduated no longer than 1 year before the time that the panel is appointed.

In addition, it is stated that each panel member has an active knowledge of the language in which the procedure will be carried out.

The panel is as balanced as possible to incorporate various perspectives.

3.3. SELECTION PROCEDURE

The selection of the panel members takes place via VLUHR QA or via the programme. In both cases, the QA Board monitors the authority, independence and expertise of the panel.

A panel consists of at least four members, including at least one student.

3.3.1. Selection via VLUHR QA

A.   Proposal of candidates

After consultation of all partners in the consortium, the programme proposes candidates in accordance with the criteria and stipulations set out under §3.2. The proposal consists of two lists: a list of possible candidate chairs and a list of possible candidate members A completed CV form is supplied for each candidate (annex 2). Candidates for whom no CV form is submitted are not included in the remainder of the procedure.

VLUHR QA makes a proposal for the selection of the panel, by ranking the panel members, using the list of candidate members.

If requested by the programme or if the proposal of the programme does not comply with the criteria, then VLUHR QA can propose candidates. In that case, the programme will be informed.

B.   Approval of the proposal

The proposal is submitted for approval to the QA Board, which checks whether the criteria for the selection of the panel were met. If the proposal is not approved by the QA Board, a new proposal must be made by VLUHR QA and the programme.

C.   Arrangements with the panel

VLUHR QA contacts the proposed members to ask whether they are willing to take part in the review panel. If the first-ranked candidate does not accept the position, the next candidate is approached. If the list is exhausted, a new proposal of candidates must be made.

The participation of the panel member will be formalised in an agreement with the VLUHR QA which includes the declaration of independence (annex 3).

D.   Ratification of the panel

The QA Board endorses the final composition of the panel. The panel and the programme will be informed.

3.3.2. Selection via the programme

A.   Proposal of candidates

After consultation of all partners in the consortium, the programme presents candidates in accordance with the criteria and stipulations set out under §3.2. The proposal includes the name of a chair and of two panel members. A completed CV form is supplied for each candidate (annex 2). Candidates for whom no CV form is submitted are not included in the remainder of the procedure.

In addition, the programme justifies the way in which the candidate members individually and the panel as a whole meet the above-mentioned criteria.

B.   Approval of the proposal

The proposal is submitted for approval to the QA Board, which verifies whether the criteria for the selection of the review are met. The QA Board endorses the final composition of the panel. The programme will be informed.

C.   Arrangements with the panel

The programme will contact the chair and members in advance with the request to participate in the panel. The programme will also plan a date with the chair and the members for the training and the site visit, in line with the arrangements made with VLUHR QA.

From the moment the proposed panel members are approved by the QA Board, VLUHR QA takes over the communication with the panel members. The participation of the panel member will be formalised in an agreement with the VLUHR QA, including the declaration of independence (annex 3).

3.3.3 Selection of the student

The candidate student member of the panel is proposed by VLUHR QA, with the agreement of the programme. The proposal is submitted for approval to the QA Board, which verifies whether the criteria for the selection of the review were met.

Selection by VLUHR QA:
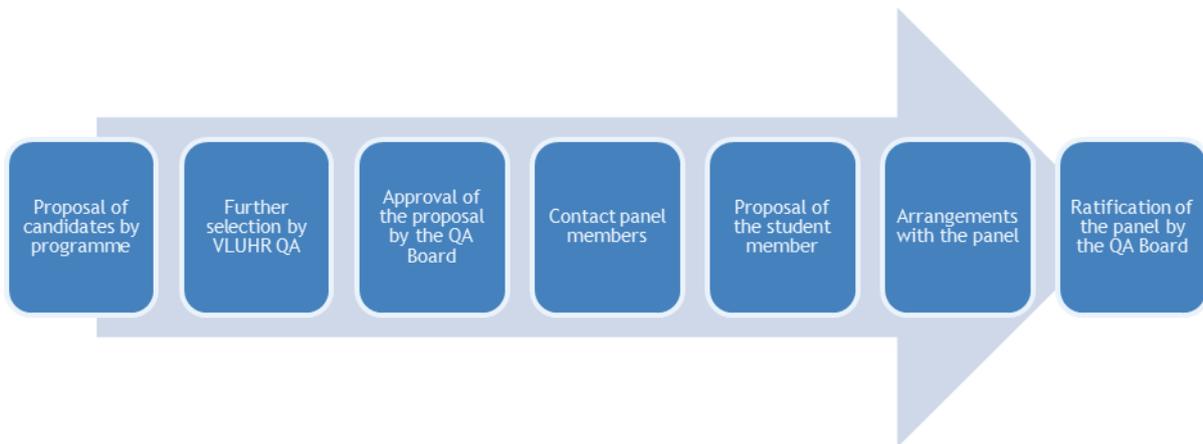
3.4. PANEL MEMBERS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each member of the panel is expected to actively contribute to the work of the team. Nevertheless, all members of the panel have their own roles and responsibilities.

3.4.1. Chair and panel members

The chair and the panel members are expected to:

- review the documentation, including the SER and any other information available prior to the site visit;
- indicate if any additional essential documentation should be requested from the programme;
- provide an individual preparation to the project manager;
- respond swiftly to emails from the project manager;
- make appropriate travel arrangements, ensuring that the most economic and sustainable option is used;
- actively participate in all meetings and discussions;
- take occasional notes during the meeting in order to be able to constructively contribute to the panel's decisions;
- contribute to the drafting of the report under the coordination of the project manager;
- carefully read and comment on the initial report and give any comments or amendments before the set deadline;
- contribute to the amendment of the report if requested by the QA Board.

More specifically, the chair shall:

- chair the meetings and discussions;
- ensure that all panel members participate in the visit actively and in a balanced way.

3.4.2. Project manager

The project manager is not a member of the panel. The project manager shall:

- discuss the process and its practical arrangements with the programme;
- ensure that the timing of the site visit is feasible.
- select and employ the panel (including the drafting of contracts) following the QA Board's consideration and decision on the panel's composition;
- serve as a liaison between the panel and the programme;
- receive the ser and distribute the documentation to the panel members;
- train the panel;
- support the panel in their practical arrangements for their hotels and meals;
- take notes during the meetings and during the panel's private discussions;
- keep a record of matters which require further clarification and bring these to the attention of the panel;
- support the panel in ensuring that the previously agreed timetable is respected;
- produce a report based on the documentation provided and the notes taken during the site visit, as well as on the written contribution from the other panel members;
- circulate the report to the panel members for comments, observations, and further contributions. after incorporating any additional suggestions, supply the report to the programme to check its factual accuracy and to comment on the content of the report;
- include the programme's amendments (if any and if accepted by the panel) in the report and produce a final version of the report;
- supply the final report to the QA Board and amend the report at the request of the QA board (if necessary) after consultation of the panel;
- prepare publication of the report on the website;
- receive and analyse feedback on the review process.

Chapter 4   Review process

4.1 TRAINING FOR PANEL MEMBERS

Prior to the site visit, the panel members are thoroughly prepared for their tasks. The training serves as the first opportunity for the panel members to get to know each other, to receive further explanations about the review process and to prepare for the activities. Preferably one month before this training, VLUHR QA submits the SER of the programme to the panel members.

During the training, the panel members receive more detailed information on the review framework and the practical details of how the review process takes place. At the same time, they are also instructed on the approach to follow and on the working method.

During the training, the visit's schedule is discussed and concrete agreements are made about a possible division of tasks within the panel. The panel then receives more information about the programme, the consortium and the institutions involved. The panel members are also informed about the educational, legal and financial preconditions in which the programme operates.

The panel also goes through the review form, which expresses the review framework in operational terms and contains the standards on which the panel has to form an opinion. The panel is informed that the review form is an internal, confidential document, in which it has to make its opinions explicit on the various standards and which will serve as a basis when writing the review report. During the training, the panel is also informed to what extent the review framework relates to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

During the training, a first discussion also focuses on the self-review report. The underlying intention is to draft the specific questions and attention points within the panel that must be addressed during the visits. Finally, the panel members receive training in communication skills that should allow them to review the programme with an appreciative approach.

4.2 PREPARATORY MEETING WITH THE PROGRAMME

During a preparatory meeting with the programme, the schedule of the visit is explained and concrete agreements are made regarding the course of the site visit. The schedules for the site visits should preferably be made available to the programme at least one month prior to the visit. The list of interview participants and the practical information are sent to the project manager at least two weeks before the site visit.

4.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit enables the panel to discuss the joint programme based on the self-evaluation report and to assess whether the programme complies with the Standards. The site visit takes one and a half days. Although the visit should normally be restricted to one location, visits to all locations should be taken into account.

The site visit includes discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions and more particularly 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, an open consultation is held. It gives students and members of staff the opportunity to speak to the panel individually or in groups.. The panel itself may also invite individuals to the open 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 of the review panel during the visit.

At the end of the visit, the panel discusses the findings with the programme's managers. The programme and the panel begin a constructive dialogue.

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 review form that he received at the beginning of the site visit from the project manager. Later, the panel jointly confirms its arguments and opinions. The panel members are expected to submit the completed individual review form to the project manager of the panel at the end of the site visit.

The site visit by the panel is concluded with an oral reporting session in which the panel gives its initial provisional conclusions and recommendations without indicating the scores.

Additional information or documents provided to the review panel after the site visit can no longer be taken into account in the review, 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 no more than five working days after the site visit.

4.4. REPORTING

The panel prepares a report that contains relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions with regard to the Standards and also contains recommendations for further development of the programme.

In case of accreditation, the panel makes a recommendation for the (accreditation) decision. The conclusions and recommendations focus more particularly on the distinctive features of the joint programme.

The project manager of the panel writes the report. This report should be no longer than 20 pages, not including appendices.

The report is presented to the panel members, discussed and confirmed. After approval by the panel, the report is sent under embargo to the programme for feedback. The programme should have the opportunity to comment on the report, to request a correction of factual errors and to comment on the content. The response of the programme is submitted to the (project manager of the) review panel no longer than three weeks after reception of the report.

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

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

For the second feedback round, the programme may also file an appeal against the report. To that end, it may file an appeal in accordance with the 'regulations for the internal review report appeals procedure' which is enclosed (annex 4). If the internal appeals procedure is used, this will be stated in the review report.

The text will be under embargo until the final publication of the review report. This does not mean that the programme cannot adapt its policy to reflect any recommendations from the review panel before the process is completed. The programme is requested, however, pending publication, not to cite the report in published documents or to publish parts of it or of the report in its entirety.

As a final step in the process, the final report is submitted to the QA Board, which checks whether the report is in line with this manual. The QA Board can ask for additional information and clarification. However, the panel remains the owner of the content of the report.

Then, the final report is published. In case the review was not conducted in English, an English summary of the report and an English version of the decision, including its reasons, is published.

The published report contains an introduction including the composition of the panel and brief description of the review process.

The following appendices are included in the review report:

- CV of the panel members;
- The visit schedule;
- consulted documents;
- administrative details of the programme.

The report of the review, which is clearly dated, is placed on the website of VLUHR QA to make it accessible to the general public. The publication date serves as a reference date for the subsequent accreditation request.
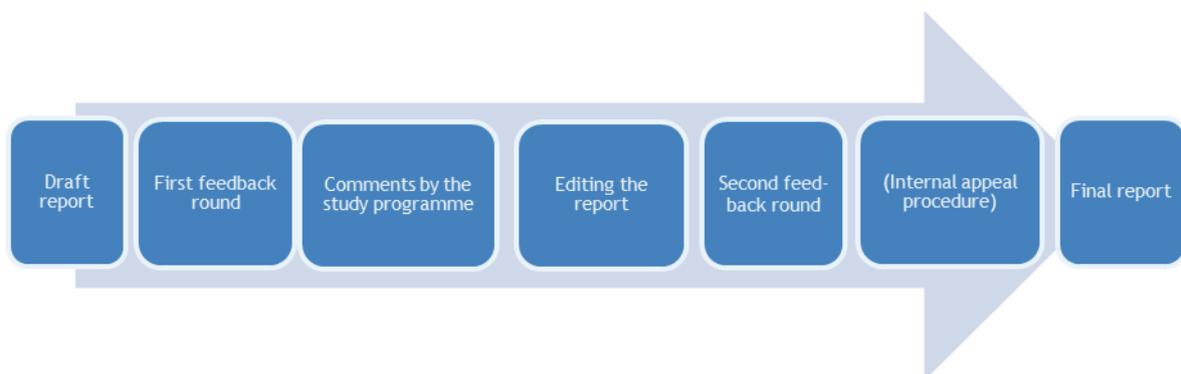
4.5. FOLLOW-UP

What is done with the results of the report is a matter for the programme and the institution. It is the responsibility of the programme to take action on the basis of the findings and recommendations of the panel. The initiative for the accreditation application also lies with the programme itself.

In the context of the improvement function, quality assurance is a continuous process that does not stop with the publication of the report. The panel's reporting is aimed at promoting the quality assurance process by formulating concrete recommendations regarding the programme. The panel also focuses explicitly on the follow-up of findings and recommendations from a previous review.

VLUHR QA supports the quality culture of a programme/institution by organising a follow-up, in which the panel, as a critical friend, discusses with the programme about the developments since the site visit.

Objective

The follow-up contributes to the promotion of the quality culture of the training/institution. The follow-up stimulates on the one hand the reflection within the training about the findings and recommendations of the

panel and on the other hand the procedure is aimed at the improvement perspective in which the training and the panel carry out a co-creative dialogue.

Working method

VLUHR QA contacts the programme/institution when the follow-up starts. Preferably, the follow-up will take place three years after the publication of the review report.

During a follow-up interview, at least one member of the original panel will talk to the programme. The panel member is supported in this by the project manager of VLUHR QA. For the purpose of this interview, the programme provides relevant information. The programme has the choice of how the information is provided.

During this interview, the programme management will further explain which developments the programme has gone through since the visit. In consultation with VLUHR QA and the programme, the need to possibly add other stakeholders (lecturers, students) to the discussion or to opt for several separate discussions can be considered. The follow-up interview is designed in a co-creative way.

Reporting

After the follow-up interview, the panel member formulates their findings. Any further recommendations can also be given. The project manager writes a report on this basis. After approval by the panel member, the report is sent to the training programme, which can correct factual inaccuracies. After correction, the final report is sent to the programme and to the QA Board. The QA Board can make suggestions and ask for additional information, clarification and explanation.

4.6 WITHDRAWAL FROM THE REVIEW

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

- if a programme is being discontinued;
- the notice that the programme wishes to withdraw must be given to the QA Board no later than 14 days after the site visit by the review panel;
- the formal decision by the institution, confirming that the programme is being discontinued must be submitted to the QA Board no later than one month after the visit by the review panel;
- the entire cost of the review is borne by the programme/institution.

4.7 Complaints

If a programme or institution is dissatisfied with the review process or with the panel members or project manager involved in the process, the programme or institution may submit a formal complaint (annex 5).

Chapter 5   Annexes

Annex 1   Administrative details of the programme

Annex 2   CV format

Annex 3   Ethical code, code of conduct and independence requirements for panel members

Annex 4   Appeal procedure

Annex 5   Complaint procedure