

Procedure for the Evaluation of Joint Programmes under the European Approach

The document describes the review process carried out by ANVUR when tasked to coordinate the evaluation procedure of joint programmes under the European Approach¹.

1. PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

The procedure outlines the steps for the initial accreditation or evaluation of international joint study programmes under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA), enabling a single, integrated quality assurance process based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

2. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

This procedure applies to joint study programmes at first-cycle (Bachelor), second-cycle (Master), and third-cycle (Doctoral) levels, developed and delivered jointly by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from at least two countries belonging to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is valid for new programmes seeking initial accreditation or existing ones undergoing periodic review. For periodic review procedures, the SER and the site visit focus in particular on the results achieved, performance indicators, and the implementation of previous recommendations; the timeline may be shortened accordingly.

3. TIMELINE

Phase	Main Tasks	Responsible Body	Timeline
1. Preliminary consultation	Contact by the coordinating Institution with ANVUR and eligibility check	Coordinating HEI + ANVUR	15 days

¹ Italian HEIs presenting a joint programme to be evaluated under the EA must refer to the ANVUR Guidelines for the management of initial accreditation of international joint study programmes within the framework of the European Approach to quality assurance (EUROPEAN APPROACH) for specific requirements according to national regulations. See ANVUR's [Guidelines](#).

Phase	Main Tasks	Responsible Body	Timeline
2. Signing of ToR and application submission	Agency selection and Terms of Reference with ANVUR. Pre-screening of national eligibility criteria by individual HEIs (if needed)	Consortium ² + ANVUR	45 days
3. Kick-off meeting	Official start of the evaluation process	ANVUR + QA Agencies representatives + Consortium representative	1 day
4. SER preparation	Draft self-evaluation report per EA 9 standards	Consortium	90 days
5. Panel composition	Appoint 4–5 experts (academic, student, stakeholder, QA)	ANVUR	30 days
6. External review/ Site visit	Review documents, conduct interviews, provide oral feedback	Review Panel	60 days
7. Draft report	Panel delivers draft report	Review Panel	30 days
8. Consortium institutions' counterarguments	Institutions (if needed) provide factual corrections to the draft report	Consortium	30 days
9. Final report and recommendations	Panel delivers the final report	Review Panel	15 days
10. Check and validation by ANVUR	ANVUR provides its validation	ANVUR	7 days
11. Final decision	ANVUR issues accreditation decision to the Consortium and responsible QA Agencies	ANVUR	30 days

² The term "consortium" does not refer to a legal consortium as defined under Italian law (Articles 2602 et seq. of the Civil Code), but rather to the "consortial agreement" as described in the framework of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. It denotes a formal collaboration among higher education institutions delivering the joint programme, governed by an agreement that specifies governance structures, degree awarding arrangements, mobility schemes, and operational procedures, without constituting a new legal entity.

4. DETAILED PROCEDURE BY PHASE

4.1 Preliminary consultation

Lead Institution initiates the preliminary consultation with ANVUR as an EQAR-registered agency competent to perform the evaluation under the European Approach. As the potential designated agency, ANVUR informs the national quality assurance (QA) agencies of the institutions jointly offering the study programme or doctorate of the assignment received.

- Responsibility: Coordinating HEI + ANVUR
- Activities: Leading HEI coordinates the process, agrees with the partners on selecting ANVUR as the EQAR-registered agency in charge of the evaluation.
- Execution: Hold coordination meetings with partner HEIs and ANVUR. Carry out a preliminary eligibility check.
- Output: Signing of an agreed Terms of Reference.
- Estimated time: 15 days

QA Checkpoint 1: Pre-screening of eligibility criteria is needed.

QA Checkpoint 2: National specific requirements and regulations must be notified to ANVUR if tasked of the review.

QA Checkpoint 3: For Italian institutions, ANVUR verifies compliance with the national eligibility requirements within this EA procedure, without initiating any additional parallel external evaluations.

4.2 Signing of ToR and application submission

ANVUR reviews eligibility of the Consortium and the proposal and confirms the formal acceptance of the request, appointing a contact officer for support.

The University coordinating the joint programme must submit the application and all required documents electronically to ANVUR through a dedicated platform. The self-evaluation report will be submitted later (see phase 3).

ANVUR will accept applications submitted no later than ten months before the expiry of the joint programme's current accreditation or recognition as a new joint programme.

- Responsibility: Consortium + ANVUR
- Activities: Coordinating HEI + ANVUR agree on procedure type (initial/review), expected timelines, and format (on-site/virtual). A formal Terms of Reference between ANVUR and the coordinating university is signed. Formal application to ANVUR
- Execution: Draft a timeline of the evaluation procedure. Signing of the ToR. Formal submission of the application (including full consortium profile, draft programme description, proposed calendar, language of instruction, and regulatory context).
- Output: Eligibility verified, the process starts
- Estimated time: 45 days

QA Checkpoint 1: Eligibility check includes: a) Institutional status of HEIs offering the programme; b) Consortium agreement, which must cover all aspects concerning the

delivery of the programme according to the SER; c) institutional involvement of all cooperating institutions

4.3 Kick-off meeting

The virtual kick-off meeting will mark the official start of the evaluation process and will be essential for aligning all participants (evaluators, institutions evaluated, coordination agency, national agencies) on the goals and structure of the evaluation procedure.

Structure and duration:

- Format: online (via Zoom, Teams, or similar)
- Duration: 60–90 minutes

Participants: Evaluation panel, HEIs consortium's representatives, QA agencies representatives, relevant stakeholders

- Responsibility: ANVUR
- Activities: Kick off virtual meeting
- Execution: Presentation of the evaluation's objectives and expected outcomes; overview of the context of evaluation.
- Output:
 - Establish a shared understanding of the evaluation framework.
 - Ensure clarity on roles, timelines, responsibilities, and deliverables.
 - Identify any logistical or contextual constraints.
 - Build trust and open communication among all parties.
- Estimated time: 1 day

4.4 Self-Evaluation Report (SER) preparation

The consortium jointly prepares the SER, whose structure aligns with the 9 standards of the EA. SER should include: SWOT analysis, national system contexts, key indicators. The report should present the programme structure, governance model, curriculum design, student services, and internal QA mechanisms (including specifications related to the legislative contexts). It should be concise (30-40 pages), written in English, and include annexes with relevant documentation. ANVUR will provide experts with a SER template and checklists. The SER must be submitted to ANVUR at least two months ahead of the site visit.

In case of substantial lack of evidence against EA standards, ANVUR can decide to suspend or postpone the site visit. Requests for additional documents by ANVUR to clarify provided information is subject to ANVUR's discretion.

- Responsibility: Joint SER Task Force (one per partner institution).
- Activities: Preparation of a joint SER aligned with the EA's 9 standards, ensuring contribution from faculty, administration, QA units, students from each of the participating institutions
- Execution: Conduct internal reviews and SWOT analyses. Prepare a 30–40 pages SER. Append national legislative contexts.

- Output: SER
- Estimated time: 90 days

4.5 Panel composition

ANVUR appoints a panel of 4–5 independent international experts, ensuring disciplinary, stakeholders, and geographic balance. Criteria:

- At least one student member.
- At least 2 academic members.
- A stakeholder's representative.
- International composition.
- Absence of conflicts of interest.
- Gender and academic balance.

Knowledge of foreign languages will also be duly taken into consideration; previous experience in evaluation activities with EA will be considered a preferential criterion. National agencies of the HEIs in the consortium may suggest experts, but ANVUR retains full authority for selection and appointment. The proposed panel is communicated to the consortium, which has 10 working days to submit any comments and reasoned requests for replacement in the event of a conflict of interest or other serious grounds. ANVUR evaluates the requests and informs the consortium of the outcome.

Training (in presence, at distance or blended) is provided to experts. Experts are entitled to a fee, with details to be provided by ANVUR.

- Responsibility: ANVUR
- Activities: Appointment of the international panel (4–5 experts (academics, students, stakeholders/professionals from different countries). Invitation to other national agencies to indicate national experts. Provision of training to experts.
- Execution: Panel experts appointed and trained
- Output: Expert Panel
- Estimated time: 30 days

4.6 External Review/Site Visit

The panel conducts a desk review of the SER, followed by a site visit during which it interviews coordination team, academic staff, students, technical staff, relevant administrative personnel, and other stakeholders. The site visit assesses operational practices, engages with key stakeholders, and identify areas for improvement. The visit will take place over one full day and will be conducted in a physical format at the designated location. A virtual follow-up session may be scheduled if needed.

Interactions will consist of:

- Guided tours of the facility
- Structured interviews and Q&A sessions
- A closing roundtable discussion to summarize findings, to validate impressions and ensure factual accuracy.

- Responsibility: Review Panel (coordinated by ANVUR for the organizational and logistical aspects)
- Activities: The panel conducts desk review and site visit

- Execution: Panel conducts
 - SER review
 - Site visit (virtual or in-person)
 - Stakeholder interviews
 - Oral feedback to the coordinating institution and ANVUR
- Duration: 1–2 days
- Output: Preliminary oral feedback and insights on compliance, review documents
- Estimated time: 60 days (including desk review and site visit)

4.7 Draft Report

The Review Panel drafts a comprehensive assessment report, structured according to the 9 EA standards and providing for each quality standard a judgment of **compliance/partial compliance/non-compliance**.

The report also includes recommendations and conditions (in case of partial compliance). The report is preliminary checked by ANVUR officers for procedural and compliance accuracy, after which a draft is shared with the consortium institutions via the leading HEI for factual correction.

The draft report will be shared in a secure format (e.g., PDF or collaborative document) with a clear deadline for review, and the consortium will be formally invited to verify its factual accuracy. A brief virtual session may be offered to walk through key findings and clarify technical details.

Feedback will be collected using a structured comment form provided by ANVUR, to ensure precision and traceability.

- Responsibility: Review Panel, ANVUR
- Activities: Draft report shared with consortium for factual correction
- Execution: Send draft report to institutions for factual verification. Apply EA judgement scale: “**Compliant**”, “**Partially compliant**”, or “**Non-compliant**”. Include recommendations, conditions and/or improvement suggestions.
- Output: Report including
 - Panel judgments (compliant, partially compliant, non-compliant)
 - Conditions and recommendations
 - Final recommendation on accreditation
- Estimated time: 30 days

4.8 Consortium institutions' counterarguments

Institutions have 30 days starting from the sending of the draft report to suggest factual corrections or counterarguments. After that, the report is submitted to ANVUR prior to finalization.

- Responsibility: Leading HEI
- Activities: Factual corrections and counterarguments can be submitted by the consortium

- Execution: The Leading HEI send counterarguments to ANVUR
- Output: Counterarguments are shared with the Panel for final verification
- Estimated time: 30 days

4.9 Final Report and Recommendations

All inputs are reviewed by the panel experts, who draft a final report. The report also includes final recommendations and conditions. Verified factual corrections will be incorporated into the final report; rationale for any feedback not incorporated will be specified by the experts in the final feedback provided to ANVUR.

- Responsibility: Review Panel
- Activities: Factual corrections are checked by the panel experts and a final report is drafted
- Execution: Send final report to ANVUR for validation and final decision
- Output: Final report, recommendation on accreditation, summary of factual corrections not accepted by the experts
- Estimated time: 15 days to check factual corrections and draft the final report

4.10 Check and validation by ANVUR

Before being validated, the final report undergoes an internal quality check by ANVUR to ensure formal completeness, internal consistency, clarity, technical accuracy, and compliance with procedures, without modifying the judgments and recommendations made by the panel. A letter summarizing factual corrections not accepted by the experts (with comments) is sent by ANVUR to the coordinating HEI to ensure transparency of the evaluation procedure and feedback to the evaluated institution.

- Responsibility: ANVUR
- Activities: Internal quality check by ANVUR
- Execution: ANVUR validates the final report, feedback to Consortium institutions
- Output: Summary of factual corrections not accepted by the experts; report validated
- Estimated time: 7 days for validation

4.10 Final Decision

The final report informs the accreditation decision. ANVUR issues the formal decision, which may be of accreditation, accreditation with conditions, or non-accreditation. Notification is sent to the institution responsible for the consortium presenting the joint programme and to the other QA agencies of the participating countries for recognition and registration of the outcome. The national QA agencies of the partners recognize the decision taken within this EA procedure, without carrying out any further external accreditation procedures on the program.

Final report is published on the ANVUR's website and uploaded into DEQAR. Transparency is ensured as Final report is published unless exceptions apply.

- Responsibility: ANVUR informs partner authorities
- Activities: Issue formal accreditation decision; ANVUR submits outcome to national QA agencies which proceed for recognition according to their national laws.
- Execution: Submit the final decision to the national QA agencies of all partners for administrative registration/recognition, without any additional external evaluation. In case of conditional accreditation, a follow up visit is organized after two years by the agency which carried out the first accreditation procedure. If conditions are met accreditation is confirmed for additional four years; if they are not met the accreditation is withdrawn.
- Output: Final decision validated
- Estimated time: 30 days

QA Checkpoint 1: The decision must be recognised by all partner institutions and their national authorities without further external evaluation.

QA Checkpoint 2: If conditions are set, the institutions must provide evidence of compliance within an agreed timeline (two years with a mid-term progress report and a follow up visit). If they are not met accreditation can be withdrawn.

5. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

The Appeal and Complaints Procedure is defined by ANVUR. The procedure ensures a clear and fair process to raise concerns or challenge decisions affecting Consortium. A written submission outlining the issue, evidence, and desired outcome is addressed to ANVUR for the evaluation procedure.

If dissatisfied with the complaint outcome, an appeal can be lodged, usually based on procedural errors or new evidence. ANVUR internal procedure for appeal and complaints is applied.

6. MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP

Following a successful accreditation, the joint programme is valid for up to six years. Any substantial changes to the programme must be reported to ANVUR for review.

In case of recommendations, a mid-term progress review is recommended after three years to assess the implementation of panel recommendations and overall programme performance.

In case of conditional accreditation, a follow-up process may include a mid-term progress report and a site visit after two years, to be performed by ANVUR. Reaccreditation should follow the same European Approach process. If conditions are not met the accreditation decision can be withdrawn.

The consortium is expected to apply the same European Approach methodology for reaccreditation at the end of the cycle, ensuring continuity and alignment with ESG principles.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Actor	Responsibility
Coordinating Institution	Initiates process, coordinates documentation and communication with ANVUR
Partner Institutions	Contribute to SER, attend site visit, and implement recommendations
ANVUR (as EQAR-registered QA Agency)	Organizes panel, leads review process, validates the final report and issues the accreditation decision
Review Panel	Independently assesses the programme, provides judgments and recommendations

8. EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Tool	Description
Eligibility Checklist	Verifies partner status and legal compliance
SER Template	Guides the structure and annexes
Review Panel Ethic Code	Defines roles, ethics, methodology
Evaluation protocol and checklist	Checks findings against standards; provides suggested questions per stakeholder group
Final Report Template	Ensures consistency and clarity