

Joint Programmes

Joint programmes are associate degree, bachelor's or master's programmes that are jointly designed, coordinated and delivered by two or more institutions. They may be offered by Dutch higher education institutions in partnership with one another or by Dutch and foreign higher education institutions. Internationally, such programmes are referred to as *joint programmes*.

GENERAL INFO

Joint programmes can enhance the attractiveness and relevance of higher education programmes. Where they involve cooperation with foreign higher education institutions, they can also strengthen the international dimension of higher education.

For higher education institutions, offering *joint programmes* can provide significant benefits. Such programmes may add academic value, or there may be disciplinary, educational or financial reasons for entering into such a partnership. As a result, collaboration is often underpinned by strategic considerations.

The concept of 'jointness' refers not only to the extent to which a programme has been jointly developed and is jointly delivered by all participating institutions, but also to the shared responsibility for, among other things, quality assurance, the education and examination regulations, student selection and admission, marketing, management and funding.

General Principles

LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

The provisions governing joint programmes are laid down in Sections 7.3c to 7.3g of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). In the Netherlands, joint programmes may take the form of a joint degree programme or a joint graduation profile, specialisation or track. The possibility for a joint graduation profile, specialisation or track to form part of a *joint programme* exists in only a limited number of other countries. In many countries, this is not possible.

A distinctive feature of the Dutch higher education system is the binary distinction between professionally oriented higher education and academic higher education. Consequently, it is not possible in the Netherlands to offer a joint programme with a combined orientation, as this would be incompatible with the binary distinction (Parliamentary Papers II, 2008–2009, 31 821, no. 3).

In the case of *joint programmes* involving foreign higher education institutions, however, a combined orientation is possible, as foreign higher education systems do not always have a binary distinction.

AWARD OF DEGREES

A jointly designed and delivered programme always leads to the award of a degree (associate degree, bachelor's or master's). The degree and the corresponding designation (for example, *Bachelor of Science* or *Master of Arts*) are stated on the diploma. The diploma serves as proof that the degree has been awarded.

Upon completion of a *joint programme*, the participating institutions may record the joint degree on a single joint diploma or on multiple separate diplomas. A joint programme therefore always leads to the award of a single joint degree, but may result in the issuance of one or more diplomas.

The term degree refers to the academic qualification and not to the diploma. The terms *joint*, *double* and *multiple* refer to the number of diplomas issued:

- In the case of a joint degree, the joint degree is recorded on a single joint diploma.
- In the case of a double degree, the joint degree is recorded on two separate diplomas.

- In the case of multiple degrees, the joint degree is recorded on more than two separate diplomas.

Where a joint programme is offered exclusively by Dutch higher education institutions, it always leads to the award of a single joint degree, which is recorded on a single joint diploma (*joint degree*).

Where a joint programme is offered by one or more Dutch higher education institutions in cooperation with one or more foreign higher education institutions, it likewise leads to the award of a single joint degree. This may be recorded on a single joint diploma (joint degree) or on multiple separate diplomas (*double degree* or *multiple degree*).

The award of a joint degree is the preferred option. In some countries, it is also a legal requirement.

CODE OF CONDUCT REGISTER

For the international acceptance of a *joint programme*, it is necessary that the Dutch higher education institution concerned, where international students are admitted, is registered in the Code of Conduct Register and complies with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for International Students in Dutch Higher Education.

Assessment Options for Two or More Dutch Higher Education Institutions

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

The assessment of a new *joint programme* is carried out on the basis of the applicable Dutch Assessment Framework, supplemented by the elements specifically relating to the assessment of *joint programmes* (see the [Implementation Rules](#)).

ACCREDITATION OF AN EXISTING PROGRAMME

The assessment of an existing *joint programme* is carried out on the basis of the applicable Dutch Assessment Framework, supplemented by the elements specifically relating to the assessment of *joint programmes* (see the [Implementation Rules](#)).

CONVERSION

In certain cases, Dutch higher education institutions may, by means of conversion, establish an accredited *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree* through the conversion of two or more Dutch programmes that are already registered in the Register of Institutions and Programmes (RIO) and accredited, provided that the programmes are already delivered jointly.

Conversion is also possible where a partner withdraws from a *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree* and the remaining partners wish to continue offering the programme jointly.

In addition, conversion is possible where a *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree* is discontinued and one of the participating institutions wishes to continue offering the programme independently.

The specific conditions applicable to the various conversion options are set out in the Implementation Rules. In all cases, NVAO assesses the application on the basis of the specific circumstances of the case.

Assessment Options for One or More Dutch Higher Education Institutions and One or More Foreign Higher Education Institutions

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

There are two options for the assessment of a new *joint programme* involving one or more foreign higher education institutions:

- assessment on the basis of the applicable Dutch Assessment Framework, supplemented by the elements specifically relating to the assessment of *joint programmes* (see the [Implementation Rules](#)); or
- assessment in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach) (see the [Implementation Rules](#)).^{**}

ACCREDITATION OF AN EXISTING PROGRAMME

There are two options for the assessment of an existing *joint programme* involving one or more foreign higher education institutions:

- assessment on the basis of the applicable Dutch Assessment Framework, supplemented by the elements specifically relating to the assessment of *joint programmes* (see the [Implementation Rules](#)); or
- assessment in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach) (see the [Implementation Rules](#)).^{**}

^{**}For the assessment of both new and existing *joint programmes*, the second option – the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach) – is preferable in almost all cases. This is because the European Approach generally enables accreditation to be obtained in multiple countries through a single assessment procedure. This is not possible under the first option, under which accreditation is valid only in the Netherlands. Such accreditation is not automatically recognised or adopted by other countries. The same applies in the opposite direction: accreditation decisions from other countries that have not been made in accordance with the European Approach are not recognised by NVAO.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION

For an assessment in accordance with the European Approach, the assessment must be carried out by a quality assurance agency that is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). NVAO may carry out assessments in accordance with the European Approach for both new and existing programmes. This is possible because NVAO is the only quality assurance agency in the Netherlands that is registered in EQAR and authorised to carry out these assessments.

Where an assessment in accordance with the European Approach has been carried out by an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency in another country, accreditation of a new or existing *joint programme* may be applied for with NVAO on the basis of the formal decision of the competent authority in that country, together with the panel's assessment report.

CONVERSION

In certain cases, Dutch higher education institutions may, by means of conversion, establish an accredited *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree*, *double degree* or *multiple degree* through the conversion of one or more already accredited foreign programmes, provided that the programmes are already delivered jointly.

Conversion is also possible where a partner withdraws from a *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree*, *double degree* or *multiple degree* and the remaining partners wish to continue offering the programme jointly.

In addition, conversion is possible where a *joint programme* leading to a *joint degree*, *double degree* or *multiple degree* is discontinued and one of the participating institutions wishes to continue offering the programme independently.

The specific conditions applicable to the various conversion options are set out in the Implementation Rules. In all cases, NVAO assesses each application on the basis of the specific circumstances of the case.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In some countries, in addition to an assessment in accordance with the European Approach, other (national) procedures must also be completed. In the Netherlands, for example, publicly funded programmes must submit an application for a macro-efficiency assessment to the Higher Education Efficiency Committee (CDHO). This national procedure is separate from the assessment in accordance with the European Approach.

STEPS

RATES

In 2026, the rates are as follows:

1. Accreditation of an existing joint programme (assessment based on the applicable accreditation framework in force at the time and the additional provisions set out in the Implementation Policy) costs €2,678 per application;
2. Accreditation of a new or existing joint programme (assessment in accordance with the European Approach), carried out by an EQAR-registered agency other than the NVAO, costs €2,678 per application;
3. The assessment and accreditation of a new or existing joint programme (assessment in accordance with the European Approach), carried out by the NVAO, costs €30,853 per application.

e. In the case of a joint degree, the coordinating institution is responsible for payment.

Different rates apply to other or alternative procedures. Costs related to international site visits or the deployment of external experts, advisory services, or additional requirements are invoiced separately.

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