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Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA)

Introduction

The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) was founded in 2003 and consisted originally of 12 accreditation organisations from 8 countries. Since then, ECA was enlarged to 17 organisations from 11 European countries.

ECA acts as a project organisation aiming at mutual recognition of each other's accreditation and quality assurance results. A first step towards reaching this goal was the signing of twelve bilateral mutual recognition agreements between ECA members in 2007. Broadening the scope of mutual recognition is especially important for joint programmes which normally need to undergo several national accreditation procedures. With a multilateral agreement on mutual recognition (MULTRA) in force, however, these multiple procedures can be replaced by one single procedure.

The MULTRA stands for a high level of trust between accreditation agencies. This trust between the partners is based on evidence gained through intense cooperation and observations of procedures amongst the MULTRA agencies.

Agencies that wish to join the MULTRA have to fulfil the requirements of the admission procedure (Annex 1). The Management Group of ECA shall coordinate the admission procedure, organise the observations according to the agreed format (Annex 2), and provide a recommendation on admission to the agencies that are already part of the MULTRA. The agencies that have signed the MULTRA decide on the admission. A new agency is only admitted if all agencies that have signed the MULTRA approve the admission.

Preamble

Aiming to contribute to the internationalisation of higher education and to enhance the mobility of students and graduates in Europe;

with the purpose to simplify the accreditation and recognition of joint programmes and degrees awarded and to provide an efficient way to expand mutual recognition to more European Higher Education Area countries;

with the additional purpose to strengthen the commitment of agencies to collaborate and to reach up to high quality standards

convinced that the multilateral recognition agreement between accreditation organisations enhance transparency in the European Higher Education Area and provide important information on the quality of foreign institutions and programmes for students, higher education institutions and the labour market;

building on the cooperation with ENIC-NARIC centres regarding the recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes;

relying on the work of ECA since 2003 to build up mutual trust between the member organisations;

taking into account the already signed bilateral mutual recognition agreements or the positive external evaluation results of the signing agencies;

acknowledging the variety of national higher education systems and accepting the existence of different legal prerequisites for accreditation [and quality assurance] procedures, standards and decisions.

Agreement

The signing accreditation organisations agree to apply the ECA principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes;

and confirm that within their competences they accept the results of the accreditation procedures of the other signing accreditation organisations when accrediting joint programmes;

on the condition that the signing agencies continue to exchange information about their accreditation systems on a regular basis. Substantial changes of the accreditation systems should be communicated without delay.

The signing accreditation organisations agree to give each other access to all relevant documents relating to the accreditation results. All documents must be treated confidentially until they are published.
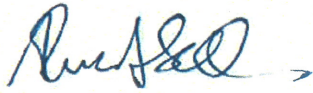
The terms of the Agreement may be modified at any time upon the consent of all parties. Consensus of all signatory parties is needed for admission of new members.
Any of the signatory parties may denounce this agreement by written notification to the other parties at any time. The written notification must include the reasons for and the date of the termination of this agreement.

The agreement is valid for three years. After a re-evaluation of the terms of the agreement it can be extended by consent of all parties.
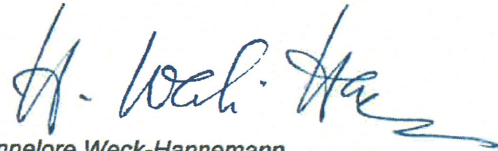
As a prerequisite to signing this agreement the interested agency must have a valid bilateral mutual recognition agreement with at least one of the signatory parties or must undergo the admission procedure described in Annex 1 based on an observation format (Annex 2).
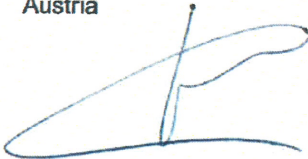
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Signatures

The following undersigning ECA member organisations join this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:
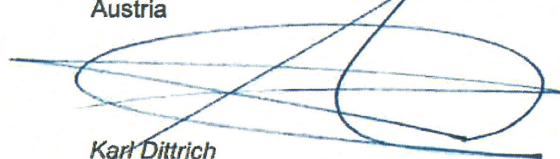
Kurt Sohm
Fachhochschulrat,
Austria

Hannelore Weck-Hannemann
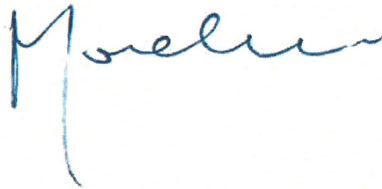Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat,
Austria

Bernard Remaud
Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI),
France

Karl Dittrich
Nederlands-Vlaamse
Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO),
The Netherlands/Flanders

Mieczyslaw Socha
Państwowej Komisji Akredytacyjnej (PKA),
Poland

Zulima Fernandéz
Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la
Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA),
Spain

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Annex 1: Admission Procedure

The admission procedure can be further developed and amended during the JOQAR project that will test and evaluate the steps of the procedure.

The ECA Management Group (MG) should function as "coordination point" for the admission procedure.

The requirement to sign the agreement is:

a) The interested agency must have a valid bilateral recognition agreement
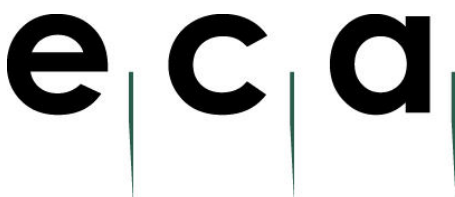
or

b) The interested agency must have a recent (not older than 5 years) external evaluation against the ESG criteria, the ECA Code of Good Practice or against a set of standards that can be considered as equivalent. The ECA MG decides on the fulfillment of this criterion by checking the submitted documents. If this requirement is met then the ECA MG nominates two observers (who are members of a MULTRA agency) to carry out an on-site-observation. One observer should join a site-visit of a programme accreditation procedure, the other one should get evidence of the accreditation practice through discussions with the agency's representatives. The observers use an observation format (Annex 2) and should conclude their report with a recommendation. The MG formally checks the observation report and forwards the report including a decision proposal to the MULTRA members.

As a rule the costs of the observation (travel and accommodation) are covered by the interested agency.

Consensus of all signatory parties is needed for admission of new members.

Original Name Organisation (Country)

Author (Acronym organisation) &

Author (Acronym organisation)

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1. Introduction

The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) has been founded in 2003 with the aim of mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions. A first step towards reaching this goal was the signing of twelve bilateral mutual recognition agreements between ECA members. These agreements are most useful for joint programmes, but twelve bilateral agreements, restricted to a limited number of ECA member countries, only fully covers a limited number of joint programmes. A multilateral mutual recognition agreement (MULTRA) with a focus on joint programmes was conceived to improve this situation. As a result, joint programmes can be assessed in a single procedure rather than through multiple national accreditation procedures.

The MULTRA stands for a high level of trust between accreditation agencies. This trust is based on evidence gained through intense cooperation and observations of procedures amongst the MULTRA agencies. The observation is not meant to repeat the external evaluation of an agency but aims to gain mutual trust through observing accreditation practice. The observation should provide evidence if the accreditation procedures and standards are free of significant differences from those of MULTRA agencies and if the results of accreditation procedures of joint programmes can thus be accepted by MULTRA agencies.

For agencies seeking to sign MULTRA, two MULTRA members will write an observation report and give a recommendation to all MULTRA members.

2.   General information

Accreditation organisation observed:	**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**
Country	**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**
Accreditation procedure regarding:	\<name of the programme and/or institution\>
Date(s) of the observation:	\<example: 1 June 2011\>
Name/organisation of the observers	\<name/organisation observer 1\>
	\<name/organisation observer 2\>

3.   Observations

The following observations are based on the self evaluation report and the external evaluation report of the agency and the evidence gained through the observation visit.

The observation report should provide evidence if the accreditation procedures and standards are free of significant differences from those of MULTRA agencies.

The observation report should also provide evidence if the results of accreditation procedures of joint programmes can be accepted by MULTRA agencies.

3.1   Framework of the procedure

In which framework did the procedure take place? This section should address the elements listed below on order to provide an in-depth understanding of the accreditation practice of the observed agency.

1.   Structure of accreditation framework (including relevant documents, e.g. legislation, ...)
2.   Accreditation standards
3.   Additional requirements for the assessment of joint programmes

4. Focus of the accreditation procedure (e.g. input factors, internal quality assurance, ...)
5. Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes
6. Enhancement strategies for institutions
7. Responsibility for accreditation procedures
8. Steps in the accreditation procedure
9. Assessment rules and decision scale when accreditation is granted (e.g. excellent, insufficient; conditions, ...)
10. Decision-making process of the agency (rules and responsibility)
11. Period of accreditation
12. Appeal system
13. Publication policy
14. Average number of procedures per year

<Your observations regarding the framework of the procedure>

3.2   Site visit

3.2.1.   The expert panel

This section of the observation report is based on the ECA Principles for the Selection of Experts. Here the observations concerning the selection of the expert panel are presented.

Number of panel members: <Total amount>

Gender balance   <Comment on the gender balance>

EXPERTISE INCLUDED IN THE PANEL OF THE OBSERVED PROCEDURE

EXPERTISE	INCLUDED
• experience in quality assurance in higher education	<Yes/No>
• appropriate academic qualifications and scientific or professional reputation in the relevant area(s)	
• relevant international experience that provides a basis for making international comparisons	
• knowledge on teaching and learning methods	
• expertise in development, design, provision and evaluation of higher education programmes	
• knowledge of the country-specific system of higher education, institutions and applicable legislation	
• student representatives in the respective area(s)	
• representatives from the labour market	
• a significant proportion of panel members from outside the country	

<Your observations regarding the panel composition>

3.2.2. The procedure

This section of the observation report is mainly based on the ECA Code of Good Practice. Here the observations concerning the ECA standards relating to the accreditation procedure and standards are presented.

<Your observations regarding the procedure>

3.2.3. Learning Outcomes

How and by what means is the assessment of achieved learning outcomes taken into account during the procedure?

<Your observations regarding the learning outcomes>

3.2.4. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 14

Standard	**The accreditation procedures must include self-documentation/-evaluation by the higher education institution and external review (as a rule on site)**
Question	- *How is the accreditation procedure structured?*
Reference points	- Self-documentation/-evaluation and external review are part of the accreditation procedure - External reviews encompass on site visits at the higher education institutions - The external review team is instructed clearly about its tasks - The accreditation organisation provides specific regulations in case of ex ante-accreditations

<Your observations regarding compliance with this standard>

3.2.5. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 15

Standard	**The accreditation procedures must guarantee the independence and competence of the external panels or teams**
Question	- *How is the independence of external panels guaranteed?* - *Are selection criteria for expert panels set up?*
Reference points	- Selection criteria for external panels/expert committees are set up and published by the accreditation organisation. - Selection criteria assure competence and independence of external experts - Independence of the experts is assured by a written statement - The decision about the composition of the expert team is made by the accreditation organisation in a transparent way

<Your observations regarding compliance with this standard>

3.2.6. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 16

Standard	The accreditation procedures must be geared at enhancement of quality
Question	- *Which elements and mechanisms within the accreditation process are used to enhance quality at the higher education institution?*
Reference points	- The accreditation process contains elements that promote quality development and improvement of the higher education institution - The accreditation process should respect autonomy, identity and integrity of the higher education institutions

<Your observations regarding compliance with this standard>

3.2.7. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 17

Standard	The accreditation standards must be made public and comply with European practices taking into account the development of agreed sets of quality standards
Questions	- *Which are the quality standards and criteria used for accreditation procedures?* - *Do they meet international standards?*
Reference points	- The quality standards and criteria used in the accreditation procedures correspond to European good practices - The quality standards and criteria are made public - The process of formulation of the quality standards and criteria is transparent and involves all important stakeholders

<Your observations regarding compliance with this standard>

4. Recommendation to the MULTRA members
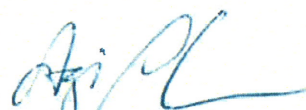
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Annex 3. New signatories to the MULTRA

Signatures

The following undersigning ECA member organisations join this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:

Agi Csonka

Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,
Denmark

Joaquim Prats Cuevas

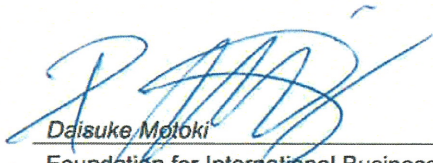Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema
Universitari de Catalunya,
Spain

Madrid, 13th of June 2012

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Signatures

The following undersigning organisations join this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:

Daisuke Motoki

Foundation for International Business
Administration Accreditation (FIBAA),
Germany

Jürgen Petersen

Zentrale Evaluations- und
Akkreditierungsagentur (ZEvA),
Germany

Consejo Nacional de Acreditación (CNA),
Colombia

The Hague, 17th of January 2013

Annex 5. New signatories to the MULTRA

Signatures

The following undersigning organisations join this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:

Patricia Martínez Barrios

Consejo Nacional de Acreditación (CNA),
Colombia

Doris Herrmann

Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch
Akkreditierung von Studiengängen e.V.
(AQAS), Germany

Madrid, 21st of June 2013

Annex 6. New signatory to the MULTRA

Signatures

The following undersigning organisation joins this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:

Dr. Ivan Leban

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
(SQAA),
Slovenia

The Hague, 11th of December 2013

Annex 7. New signatory to the MULTRA

Signatures

The following undersigning organisation joins this Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes:

Sonia M. Mora Escalante
Agencia Nacional Oficial de Acreditación
de la Calidad de la Educación Superior
de Costa Rica (SINAES),
Costa Rica

San José, 19th of March 2014