

# Pilot Procedures for awarding the Joint European Degree Label



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and Scope

These Procedures set out QQI's arrangements for assessing eligible joint programmes coordinated by a relevant provider<sup>1</sup> for compliance with the criteria for the Joint European Degree Label and, where all applicable criteria are met, for awarding the Joint European Degree Label (the Label). They apply where QQI is the competent body responsible for assessing and awarding the label in accordance with the [Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label](#).

The Label is an additional European recognition. It is not a qualification or academic award, a programme accreditation or validation decision, or a conferral of awarding powers, and it does not replace statutory quality-assurance, accreditation, validation or recognition requirements.

These Procedures implement the [Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label](#) (Operational Guide) in the Irish context and must be read with it. The Operational Guide determines the substantive criteria and European requirements for award of the Label.

The Procedures have been developed as interim pilot procedures to support the initial implementation and testing of the process of awarding the Joint European Degree Label. They will operate alongside [Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European Approach](#) during the pilot phase.

Following review of the pilot outcomes and any European-level developments, QQI intends to incorporate the Joint European Degree Label procedures into the Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European Approach.

## 1.2 Relationship with the European Approach

The Joint European Degree Label builds on existing quality assurance arrangements for joint programmes and is founded on the principle of non-duplication.

The assessment for the purpose of awarding the Label does not constitute a programme accreditation process and does not involve a full evaluation or re-evaluation of a programme. Rather, it builds upon a positive evaluation conducted under the [Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the](#)

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<sup>1</sup> As defined within the [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012, as amended](#)

[European Approach](#) and focuses on those criteria associated with the specific objectives and added value of the Joint European Degree Label.

Where a joint programme has received a positive evaluation under the European Approach, QQI will apply the ‘Mapping of indicators to assess compliance with the criteria of the Joint European Degree Label’ as set out in Annex 5 of the Operational Guide (p. 53).

Applicants will not be required to resubmit evidence already held by QQI or contained in the European Approach evaluation documents unless QQI identifies a material evidential gap. (OG section 2.5, pp. 10–11; Table 1)

In accordance with the Operational Guide:

- criteria fully addressed through a positive European Approach evaluation shall not normally be reassessed;
- criteria partially addressed through the European Approach shall be assessed using the European Approach evaluation report as a foundation, supplemented by additional evidence where required;
- criteria not addressed by the European Approach shall be subject to a full compliance assessment.

### *1.3 Nature of these Procedures*

The substantive Label criteria, indicators, and indicative evidence are set out in section 3 (pp. 12-27) and the annexes of the Operational Guide. These Procedures add only the arrangements required for QQI implementation including:

- eligibility and application requirements;
- external assessment arrangements;
- decision-making;
- complaints and appeals;
- monitoring of compliance;
- withdrawal of the Label.

### *1.4 Associated Documents*

These Procedures should be read in conjunction with:

- [Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label](#);

- Annex 2 to the Operational Guide: Recommended template for the self-assessment report (pp. 40 – 45);
- Annex 3 to the Operational Guide: Evidence portfolio (pp. 46-50);
- Annex 4 to the Operational Guide: Templates for the Joint European Degree Label certificates (pp. 51-52);
- Annex 5 to the Operational Guide: Mapping of indicators to assess compliance with the criteria of the Joint European Degree Label (pp. 53-58);
- [QQI Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European Approach](#).

## 2. Eligibility

### 2.1 *Eligible Programmes*

A programme is eligible only where it:

- is a joint programme<sup>2</sup> delivered by higher education institutions from at least two countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme;
- leads to a nationally recognised joint degree at EQF level 6, 7 or 8;
- has received, or is being assessed for, the applicable positive quality-assurance decision under the European Approach for the selected route; and
- meets all other eligibility conditions in Operational Guide section 2.1.

The coordinating institution must demonstrate that the award is legally recognised as a joint degree in each relevant jurisdiction. For an Irish award, the application must identify the award type and NFQ level and show its correspondence with EQF level 6, 7 or 8.

### 2.2 *Eligible Applicants and Coordinating Institution*

Applications under these Procedures must be made by an Irish coordinating institution that is a relevant provider. It must identify the legal and quality-assurance

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<sup>2</sup> The label is awarded to a joint programme, both programmes... Joint programmes leading only to double or multiple degrees are not eligible for the Joint European Degree Label, neither are joint programmes with institution-specific, non-degree or non-state-validated awards. (OG section 2.1, p. 4, footnote 9)

status of each partner and the body competent to award the Label (OG sections 2.2 and 2.3.1, pp. 4–5).

The coordinating institution shall act as the principal point of contact with QQI throughout the assessment process and shall be responsible for all requests, submissions and liaison with QQI on behalf of the consortium.

QQI will not undertake an assessment under these Procedures where the coordinating institution for the joint programme is established outside Ireland. The participation of an Irish higher education institution in the consortium shall not make the programme eligible for assessment by QQI where that institution is not the coordinating institution.

## 3. Application

The Coordinating Institution must contact QQI before submission of an application.

### 3.1 *Application Documentation*

Applications shall include:

- a completed application form;
- a Self-Assessment Report prepared using the template specified in Annex 2 of the Operational Guide;
- an Evidence Portfolio prepared using the template specified in Annex 3 of the Operational Guide;
- the consortium agreement;
- the European Approach evaluation report, where available or applicable;
- any additional documentation requested by QQI.

### 3.2 *Eligibility Assessment*

QQI shall assess the application to determine whether:

- the programme is eligible;
- the applicant satisfies the requirements of Section 2.2;
- the required documentation has been submitted;

- the application may proceed to assessment.

QQI may request additional information before accepting an application.

For a new programme, evidence may include approved, programme-specific plans, policies, agreements and implementation commitments. The panel will assess whether they are concrete, credible, resourced and appropriate to the programme's stage (OG section 2.3.1, p. 6).

## 4. External Assessment

### 4.1 *Appointment of an External Assessment Panel*

QQI shall appoint an independent external assessment panel to assess applications for the Joint European Degree Label. In accordance with the Operational Guide, where the Label assessment is conducted as a standalone procedure, the panel shall comprise at least three international peer experts, including one student member. QQI will give the applicant an opportunity to comment on proposed members solely on independence or conflict grounds; final appointment remains QQI's decision (OG section 2.3.1, p. 6).

Where the Label assessment is undertaken at the same time as a European Approach evaluation, QQI shall normally use the same external assessment panel to consider the additional Label criteria, supporting an efficient process and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

Collectively, the panel shall possess appropriate expertise in:

- higher education and quality assurance;
- joint programme provision;
- international higher education cooperation; and
- student-centred learning and the student experience.

QQI may appoint additional members where specialist expertise is required.

Panel members shall be independent of the applicant consortium and shall be appointed in accordance with QQI's [Code of Conduct for Experts](#).

## 4.2 *Assessment Process*

The external assessment panel shall normally undertake a desk-based assessment.

The panel shall consider:

- the Self-Assessment Report;
- the Evidence Portfolio;
- the European Approach evaluation report, where available or applicable;
- supporting documentation provided by the consortium;
- any additional information requested during the assessment.

The panel may seek clarification or supplementary evidence where necessary.

The panel may meet online with representatives of the consortium where clarification of evidence is required.

## 4.3 *Assessment Methodology*

Programmes shall be assessed against the criteria, indicators and synergy mapping set out in the Operational Guide, including Annex 5.

The panel shall rely on the findings of the European Approach evaluation to the maximum extent possible and shall verify compliance only with those elements relevant to the award of the Label. The panel shall not normally revisit matters already determined through the European Approach unless:

- a material change has occurred; or
- evidence raises concerns regarding continued compliance.

The assessment shall follow a binary pass/fail approach. Each criterion shall be assessed as:

- Met; or
- Not Met.

All applicable criteria must be met before the Label may be awarded, (OG, p.6).

#### **4.4 Assessment Report**

The Assessment Report will state the evidence considered and the reasons for each finding.

The report shall explain how the assessment has relied on relevant European Approach evaluation evidence, where available, and shall identify the criteria for which additional evidence or a full compliance assessment was required.

Following evaluation by the external panel, QQI will send the report to the coordinating institution for a factual accuracy check within a specified period. The check may correct factual errors or identify evidence already submitted; it is not an opportunity to redesign the programme or submit a materially new case (OG section 2.3.1, p. 7).

## **5. Decision-Making and Outcome**

### **5.1 Panel Recommendations**

The panel will recommend either award or non-award of the Label. Before finalising the report, it may request essential clarification through QQI. The panel may not recommend a conditional award.

### **5.2 Award Decision**

QQI's Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) will decide to award or not award the Label or refer a specified matter to the external panel before a final decision. QQI may award the Label only where all applicable criteria are Met; no award with conditions may be made.

In making its determination, the ARC shall consider the Assessment Report, the recommendation of the external assessment panel, any supplementary material requested during the assessment process, and any relevant procedural matters.

### **5.3 Notification of Outcome and Publication**

QQI shall notify the coordinating institution in writing of the outcome.

QQI shall maintain and publish a record of programmes awarded the Joint European Degree Label and shall publish assessment reports, award decisions, non-award decisions and withdrawal decisions in accordance with QQI's transparency arrangements and any applicable DEQAR publication arrangements.

### **5.4 Validity and Use of the Label**

Validity is aligned with the programme accreditation cycle and ends when accreditation expires or a new QA evaluation is required (OG section 2.4.2, p. 9).

Only a programme awarded the Label may use its visual identity. The coordinating institution is accountable to QQI for correct use across the consortium. The consortium agreement must allocate responsibility for a standalone certificate or references on the joint degree or diploma supplement, (OG section 2.4.4, p. 10; Annex 4).

## 6. Complaints and Appeals

### 6.1 Complaints

Complaints relating to the administration of these Procedures may be submitted and considered in accordance with QQI's [Complaints](#) process.

### 6.2 Appeals

An applicant consortium may appeal a decision not to award the Label. The appeal shall be submitted through the Irish designated coordinating institution. Appeals must be submitted within twenty working days of notification of the decision.

#### **Grounds for Appeal**

Appeals may be made only on the following grounds:

- procedural irregularity;
- conflict of interest;
- material error in the application of these Procedures;
- significant new evidence that was not reasonably available during the assessment process.

An appeal shall not constitute a reassessment of the programme.

#### **Appeals Process**

QQI shall appoint an independent Appeals Panel, none of whose members shall have participated in the original assessment or decision-making process.

The Appeals Panel may:

- confirm the original decision;
- remit the decision for reconsideration;

- refer the application to a newly constituted assessment panel.

The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be final.

Following a final decision not to award the Label, the consortium may not submit a new application for the same joint programme within one year of the final decision, in accordance with the Operational Guide.

## 7. Monitoring

### 7.1 *Annual Reporting*

During the pilot, QQI shall require a consortium-level annual return to be submitted through the Coordinating Institution.

The pilot return should be limited to programme status; number of graduates whose documents reference the Label; method of reference; material changes notified; substantiated misuse; and implementation issues. QQI will review the necessity of the return at the end of the pilot.

The report shall specify:

- the number of graduates in respect of whom the Label was issued;
- the number of Labels issued by or through each such institution; and
- the country in which each such institution is established.

The report shall also confirm whether the Label was issued by means of a separate certificate, a reference on the joint degree, a reference in the diploma supplement, or another means permitted under the Operational Guide.

The report shall be submitted in the form and by the date specified by QQI. QQI may request supporting or supplementary information where necessary for monitoring purposes.

### 7.2 *Notification of Significant Change*

The consortium shall notify QQI of any significant change that may affect compliance with the Label criteria.

Such changes may include changes to:

- consortium membership;
- programme governance;

- degree-awarding arrangements;
- mobility requirements;
- programme structure;
- arrangements relating to inclusion, sustainability or European values.

QQI may request further information or require further assessment where appropriate.

## 8. Compliance, Corrective Action and Withdrawal

### 8.1 *Continued Compliance and Corrective Action*

QQI may assess continued compliance with the Label criteria where concerns arise through monitoring activities, significant change notifications, complaints or other relevant information.

Where QQI identifies substantiated concerns, it will notify the coordinating institution of the concerns and basis, allow the consortium a reasonable opportunity to respond, and, where appropriate, specify corrective action within a defined and proportionate period (OG section 2.4.3, pp. 9–10).

### 8.2 *Continued Compliance and Corrective Action*

QQI may withdraw the Label where corrective action is not implemented or serious non-compliance persists. The reasoned and documented decision will be notified, published and reported to DEQAR and relevant national authorities (OG section 2.4.3, pp. 9–10).

Students enrolled at the point of withdrawal retain the right to have the Label referenced in their graduation documents, including through a certificate or its appearance on the joint degree and/or diploma supplement. The consortium must communicate the withdrawal and this protection to affected students.

## 9. Operational Guide Cross-Reference

| QQI Procedures              | Operational Guide Reference      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Purpose/status              | Section 1, pp. 1–2               |
| Eligibility/routes          | Section 2.1, p. 4                |
| Double/multiple degrees     | p. 4, footnote 9                 |
| Competent awarding bodies   | Sections 2.2–2.3.1, pp. 4–5      |
| Evidence/panel/method       | Section 2.3.1, pp. 6–7; Annex 3  |
| European Approach overlap   | Section 2.5, pp. 10–11; Annex 5  |
| Decision/publication/appeal | Section 2.4.1, p. 9              |
| Validity                    | Section 2.4.2, p. 9              |
| Correction/withdrawal       | Section 2.4.3, pp. 9–10          |
| Usage                       | Section 2.4.4, p. 10; Annex 4    |
| Criteria                    | Section 3, p. 12 onward; Annex 5 |



















