Joint Programmes as a driver for European Higher Education Area tools and commitments?

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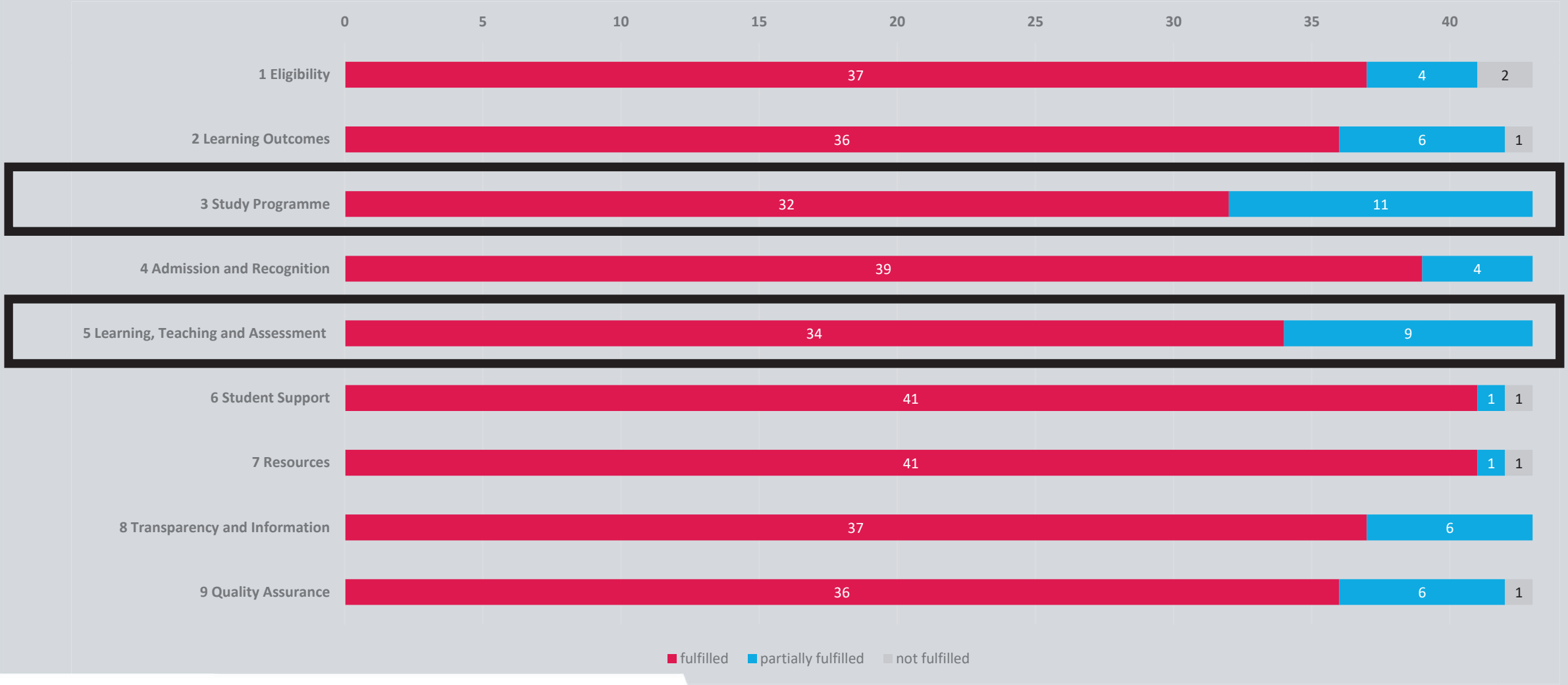
Starting points

- Prior research for a paper presented at the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) in November 2025 in Budapest on results of external QA procedures using the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
  - Exploratory and descriptive
  - Some interesting findings

European Approach results 2025



Starting points

- Discussion of the European Degree (Label) and how it is being linked to the implementation of Bologna instruments

FURTHERMORE, MEMBER STATES ARE INVITED TO

a) where this has not yet been done, fully implement Bologna instruments – such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the Diploma Supplement, the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes – as key facilitators for implementing the joint European degree label.

Council of the European Union: Council Resolution on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree: boosting Europe's competitiveness and the attractiveness of European higher education, 7 May 2025

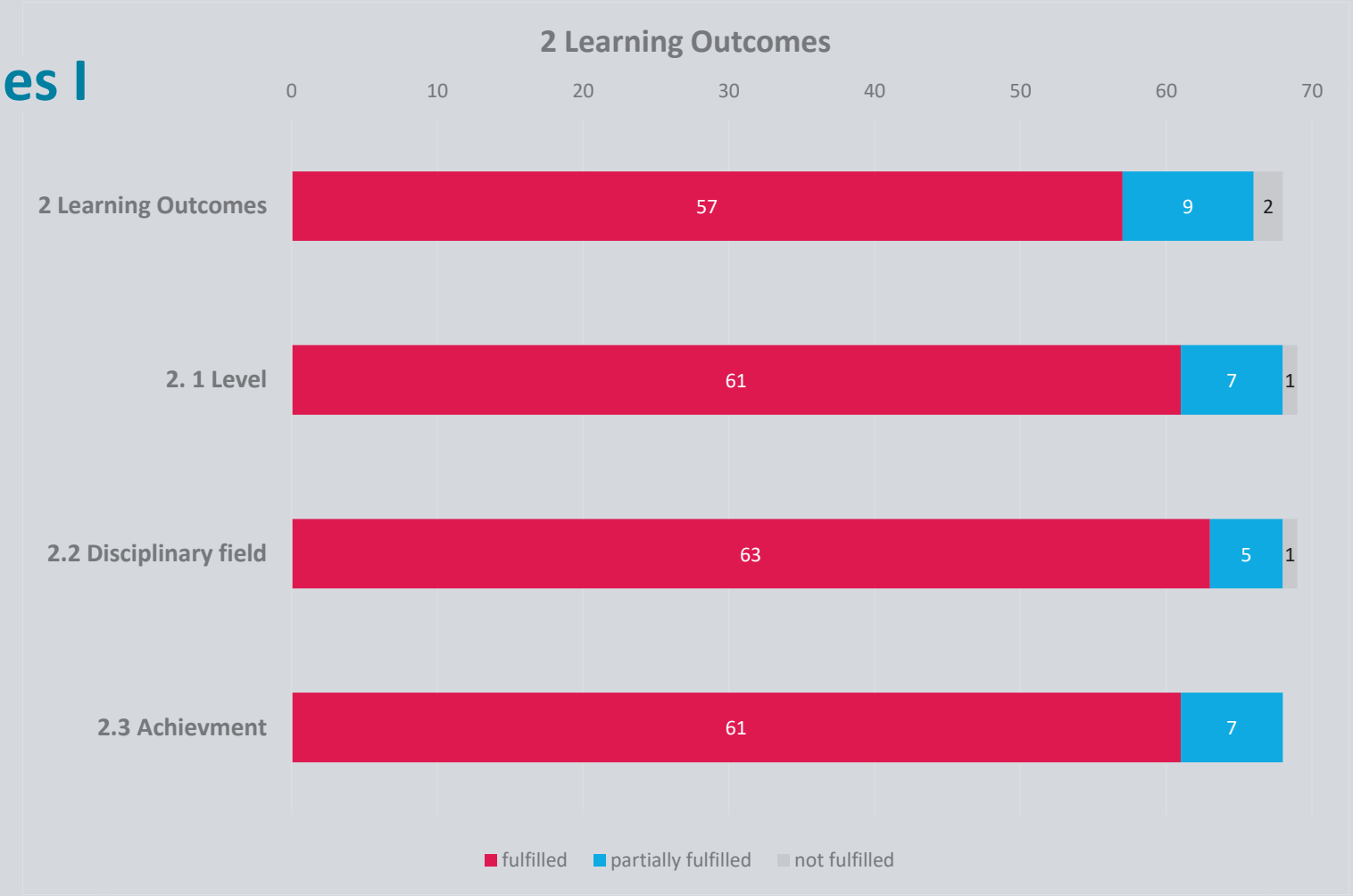
Key commitments of the EHEA and European Approach Standards

- How are joint programmes doing when it comes to implementing Bologna instruments?
- Focus on three Key Commitments (Paris Communiqué 2018) and relevant standards of the European Approach
  - Three cycle degree system: QF EHEA, national qualification frameworks -> Standard 2 Learning Outcomes
  - Lisbon Recognition Convention -> Standard 4 Admission and Recognition
  - Quality assurance: European Standards and Guidelines - > Standard 9 Quality Assurance

Method

- Sample of 68 review reports:
  - Available in English and listed as currently valid on DEQAR in August 2026
  - June 2025: 43 reports currently valid accessible
- Only standards considered that were assessed as anything less than “fulfilled” or “compliant”, although a lot of panels give recommendations for fulfilled standards
- Focus not on the individual programme and its challenges, but on standards and common challenges

Standard 2
Learning Outcomes I



Standard 2 Learning Outcomes II

2.1 Level

General issues

- 4 programmes: QF level of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) not demonstrated clearly enough
- 2 programmes: rephrasing using Bloom's taxonomy
- 1 programme: differences in phrasing of ILOs between documents

Joint programme related issue

- 2 programmes: Lack of alignment with some of the national qualification frameworks of the partners' systems

Standard 2 Learning Outcomes III

2.2 Disciplinary field

General issues

- Lack of certain field specific content and transversal skills
- Description of the programme:
  - Breaking down programme level ILOs into operational ILOs
  - Defining how courses and their ILOs contribute to them
  - Describing assessment

Joint programme related issues

- Harmonisation of ILOs descriptions
- Impact of mobility
- Demonstrating how the programme benefits from joint delivery

Standard 2 Learning Outcomes IV

2.3 Achievement

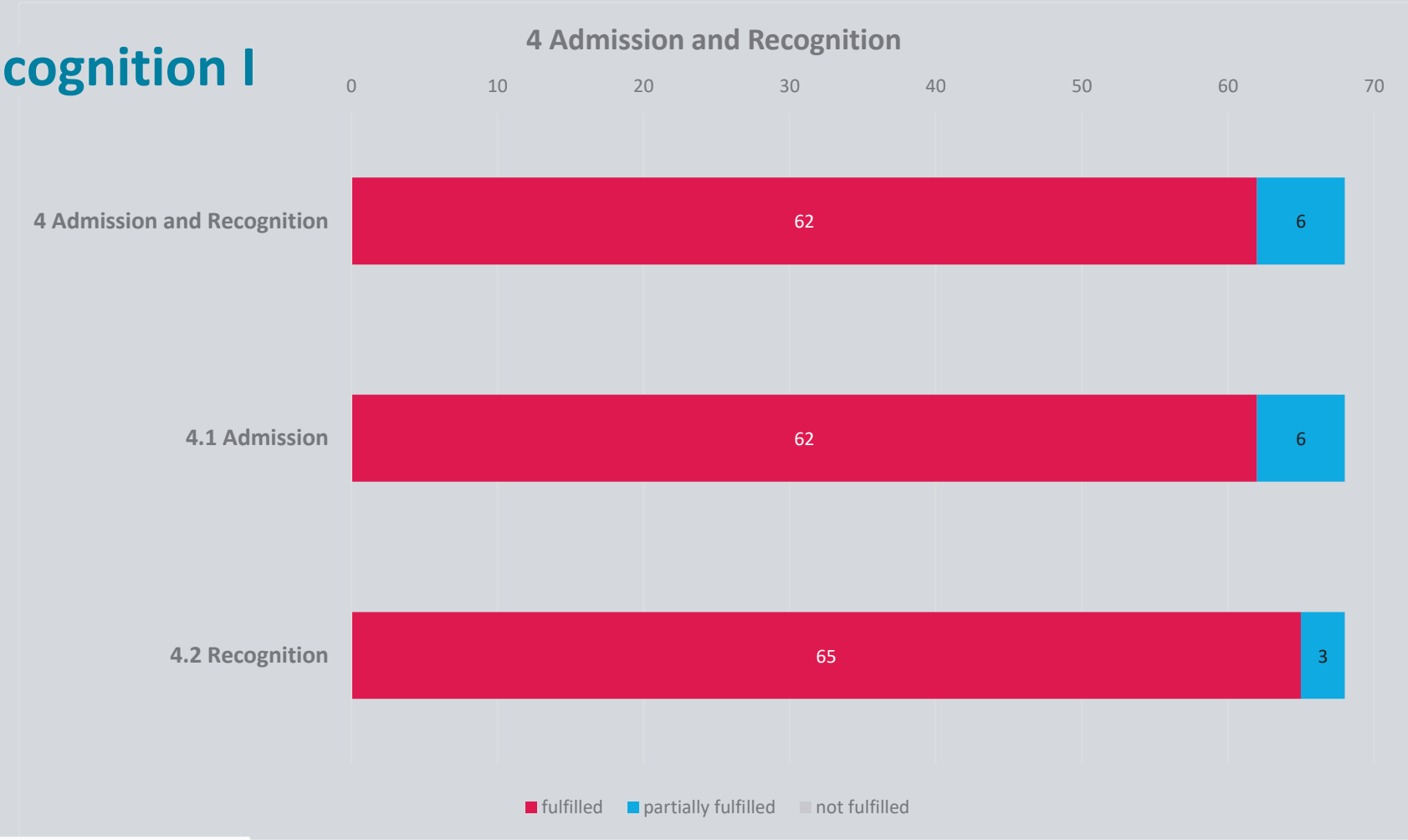
General issues

- Lack of information about how ILOs are going to be achieved
- Lack of descriptions of measures to ensure ILOs are achieved
- Some ex-ante reviews: Situation on paper satisfying but panels refrained from fully assessing achievement

2.4 Regulated Professions

So far, no review of a joint programme leading to a qualification in a regulated profession is listed in DEQAR

Standard 4
Admission and Recognition I



Standard 4 Admission and Recognition II

4.1 Admission

General issues

- 5 programmes: Better define the entry profile of students:
  - Need of knowledge complementary to the majority of prospective students' bachelor programmes
  - Evaluation of applicants holding a bachelor degree different from the programme's field
- 2 programmes: Recommendations concerning affirmative action rules:
  - Include them in the admission criteria
  - Make them explicit in a case where they are already planned
- 2 programmes: Unclear information about the admission procedure: details about the criteria, their ranking / weighing, how points can be achieved in different parts of the entry procedure
- 1 programme: Unclear, how non-standard or non-Bologna qualifications are assessed

Standard 4 Admission and Recognition III

4.2 Recognition

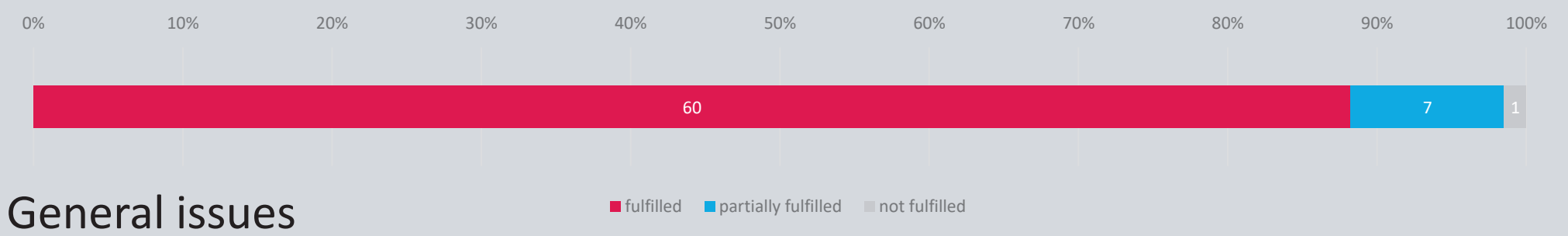
General issue

- 1 Programme: Lack of information on possibility of RPL for informal learning

Joint programme related issues

- 2 programmes: Lack of clarity in certain aspects of the recognition policy as part of the cooperation agreement:
  - Lack of detailed information on the number of ECTS credits recognised between HEIs
  - Specification and alignment with admission requirements of the partner HEIs

Standard 9 Quality Assurance



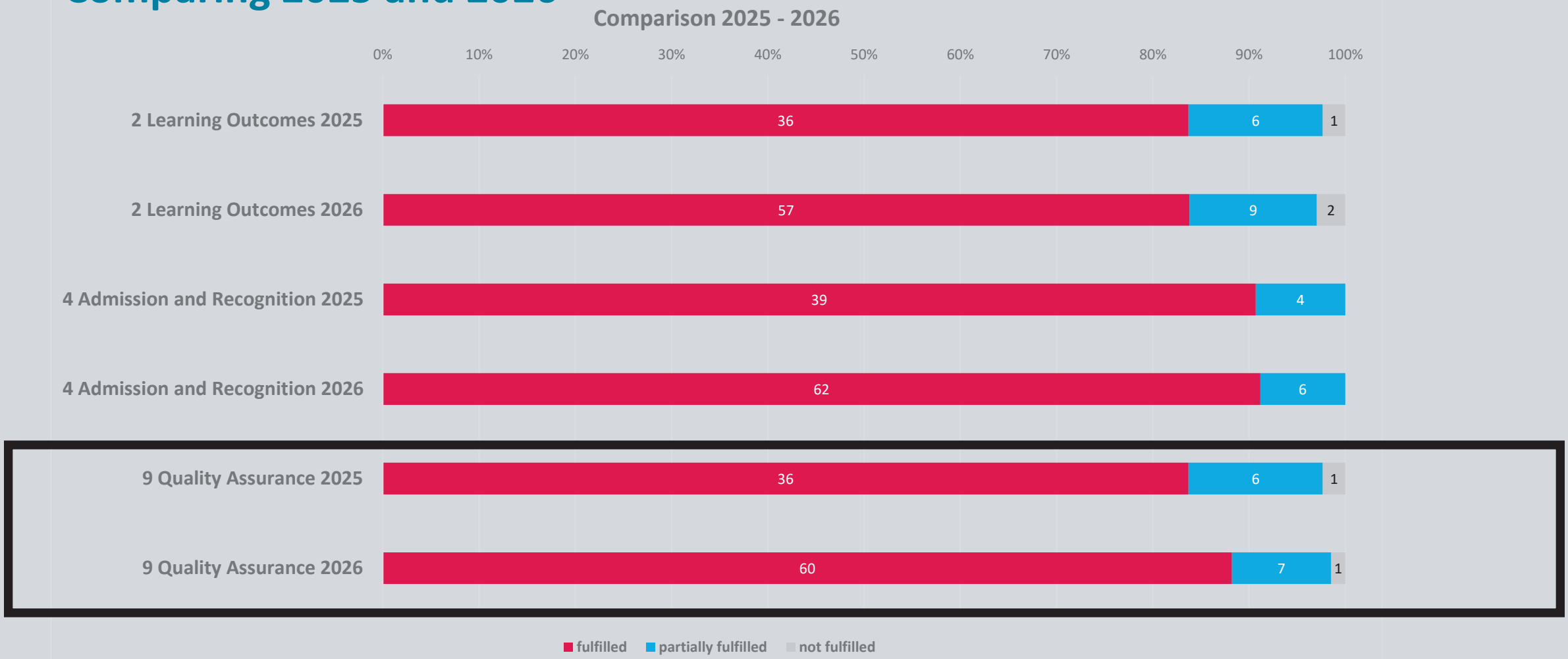
General issues

- 4 programmes: Missing or incomplete QA policies
- 1 programme: Lack of involvement of stakeholders from outside academia

Joint programme related issues

- 5 programmes: Lack of integration of institutional policies in a joint system
  - Need for harmonisation
  - Lack of structures or joint ownership and unclear responsibilities

Comparing 2025 and 2026



Summary

- Challenges of joint programmes with respect to the key commitments of the European Higher Education Area
  - Highest number of challenges in Standard 2 Learning Outcomes
  - Lowest number in Standard 9 Quality Assurance
- Standard 9 Quality Assurance: indication of a positive trend over time
- For all three standards: most issues found could occur for any study programme and not related to the joint delivery of the programme
- Challenges for joint programmes:
  - Standard 2 Learning Outcomes: alignment with different national qualification frameworks
  - Standard 4 Admission and Recognition: procedures for recognition between partners
  - Standard 9 Quality Assurance: procedures and structures on the overarching programme level

Conclusion

- Implementation of EHEA key commitment
  - Additional challenges for joint programmes
  - Understanding tools and properly implementing them is a prerequisite for successful joint programmes
- Continued focus on these foundations is needed:
  - Understanding and implementing qualification levels and learning outcomes
  - Fair and transparent recognition of qualifications, credits and competences in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention
  - Internal quality management structures fostering enhancement and fit for cooperation in compliance with the ESG

EQAF Paper

Comments, Questions?

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