European Approach and European Degree Label – Lessons learned, work in progress and reflection in the context of the European University E³UDRES²

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Outline

- Challenges of the European Approach for Joint Study Programmes
- First experiences with the European Degree Label
- Reflection of gaps and added value

Our starting point

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- USTP & E³UDRES² launched two Joint Master Programmes so far, both accredited with the European Approach (today: „GRACE“ and „JEUDITH“)
  - GRACE is already in the process of obtaining the European Degree Label
  - JEUDITH will be adapted in 2027 (Erasmus+ Pathway project)
- Plan: Accreditation of 4 further Joint Programmes + European Degree Label by the end of 2029
- **Leopold Kögler-Vencour** – International Relations and Programme Development, involved in development and accreditation of both Joint Master Programmes, as well as in the NVAO pilot project towards the European Degree Label for GRACE
- **Giuliana Sabbatini** – Higher Education Development and Quality Management, member of the Policy Lab of the European Commission on the European Degree Label as EURASHE representative

European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

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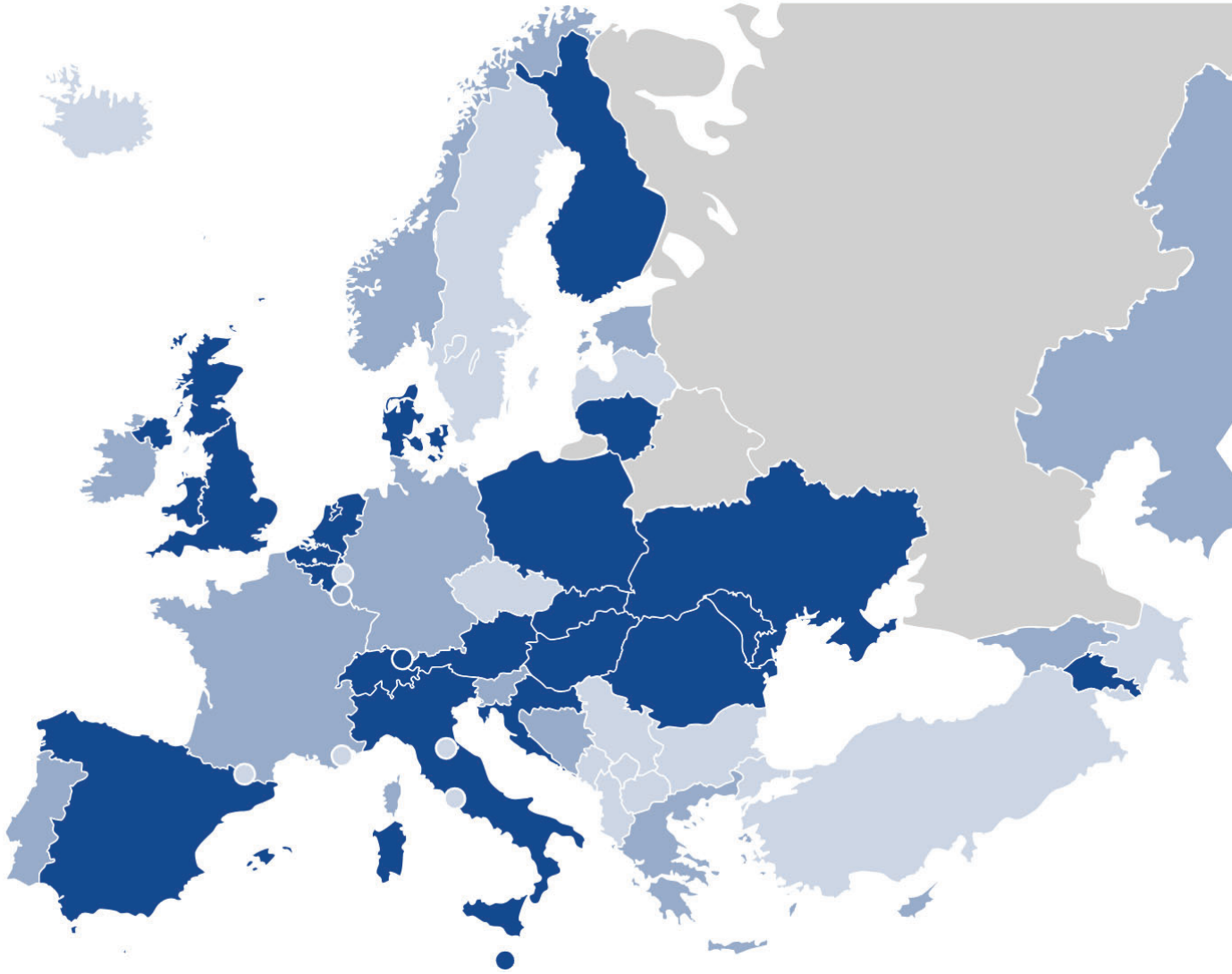
- Approved by the EHEA ministers in May 2015, it defines application rules, standards and procedures across national frameworks
- Joint programmes are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries, and leading to double/multiple degrees or to a joint degree
- External accreditation procedures for both E³UDRES² Joint Master Programmes were performed by AQ Austria
- Accreditation completed in 2023 (GRACE) resp. 2024 (JEUDITH)
- GRACE: USTP/Austria, Saxion/Netherlands, ViA/Latvia
- JEUDITH: USTP/Austria, Saxion/Netherlands, Jamk/Finland

European Approach availability

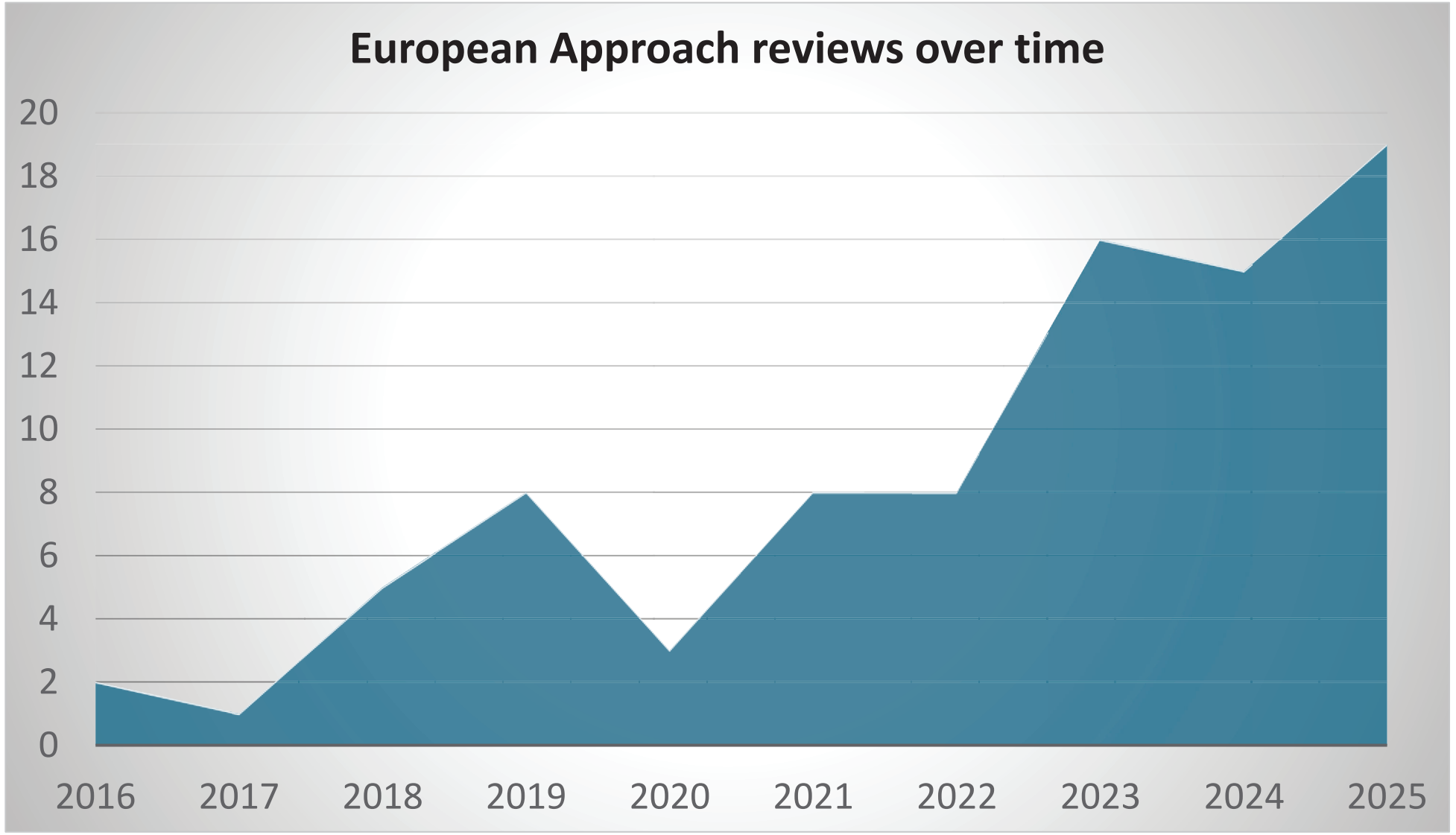
All higher education institutions are able to use the European Approach

Some higher education institutions, or only under specific conditions can use the European Approach

European Approach cannot be used to satisfy national QA requirements



European Approach uptake



Source: DEQAR

Challenges we experienced with the European Approach from a QA pov

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1. The degree to which the European Approach is applied still differs by country (examples: NL and LV)
2. National frameworks regulating UAS differ across the EHEA (e.g. external accreditation vs. self-accrediting)
3. The European Approach is after ten years (still!) relatively new to all institutions involved, including quality assurance agencies (communication!)
4. Many (national) documents regarding external QA are not available in English, making communication among partners and agencies difficult
5. The criteria in the European Approach are more broadly defined than in the national accreditation provisions
6. The timeline for developing Joint Programmes extends far beyond the timeline for accreditation at the national level!

European Degree Label

- **Political intention**
- From the Recommendation[1)] to the Operational Guide: Policy Lab
- First steps
  - Exploratory call was launched (E³UDRES² UAS4Joint got approved)
  - Direct pilots with some agencies (e.g. NVAO / Netherlands – see GRACE)
  - Agencies are preparing their procedures
  - Second call planned before the end of 2026
- **European Degree?**

[1)] Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education (2025)

Main aspects

- **Yes/No decision** leading to the awarding of the label, not an enhancement-led quality assurance procedure
- Joint programmes at EQF level **6, 7, 8** are eligible
- With at least two degree-awarding HEIs from at least two EU Member States or EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway)
- Leading to the award of a **joint degree** by at least 2 of the participating HEIs
- Two sets of criteria: **Part B** defines additional criteria (**European dimension criteria**)
- **Part A** defines criteria building on the **European Approach** (**Programme organisation criteria**): when the joint programme has been positively evaluated using the **procedure** of the European Approach (by a QA agency or a self-accrediting HEI), several criteria can be considered as met and do not need to be re-assessed

Overview criteria and synergies

For each, the Operational Guide for the Joint European Degree Label provides:

- Criterion statement
- Applicable EQF levels
- Objective
- Short description
- The criterion is met if…
- Synergy with the European Approach (if given)

Dimension A Programme organisation criteria		
A.1. Higher education institutions involved		◐
A.2. Transnational joint degree delivery	**A.2.1.** Joint design and delivery	●
	A.2.2. Joint degree	◐
	A.2.3. Joint diploma supplement (EQF 6 & 7)	◐
	A.2.4. Use of ECTS Users' Guide (EQF 6 & 7)	●
A.3. Joint arrangements for the joint programme		◐
A.4. Quality assurance arrangements	**A.4.1.** Internal and external quality assurance	●
	A.4.2. European Approach	●
A.5. Graduate tracking		○
A.6. Student-centred learning		●
A.7. Transnational campus – access to services		◐
A.8. Flexible and embedded student mobility	**A.8.1.** 30 ECTS physical mobility (EQF 6 & 7)	◐
	A.8.2. Six Months physical mobility (EQF 8)	◐
A.9. Co-Evaluation and Co-Supervision for Dissertations (EQF 8)		○

Dimension B European dimension criteria		
B.1. Interdisciplinarity and research-based learning		○
B.2. Learning opportunities beyond academia and employability		◐
B.3. Digitalisation		○
B.4. Values		○
B.5. Multilingualism		○
B.6. Inclusiveness	**B.6.1.** Diversity, equality, and inclusion	○
	B.6.2. European Charter for Researchers (EQF 8)	○
B.7. Environmental sustainability		○

GRACE Consortium –
Is the Accredidation after European Approach possible?

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Partner Institution & Country	Accredidation after European Approach for Joint Programmes	Crossboarder Quality Assurance
UAS St. Pölten (USTP) / Austria	Austria is accepting EA for all Higher Education Institutions	UAS: yes, after having been re-accredited by AQ Austria
Vidzeme UAS (VIA) / Latvia	Latvia is not accepting EA for any HEI	Recognising EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national external QA requirements; AIC has to be informed by HEI about CB QA and result is rechecked by AIC, which also makes final decision. (4 - 6 months)
Saxion UAS / Netherlands	The Netherlands are accepting EA for JP for all HEI.	Recognising foreign agencies based on their own framework/requirements; EQAR-agency must agree to terms of condition to NVAO and the penal secretary has to be trained by NVAO; NVAO takes final decision on accredidation (3 - 4 month)

JEUDITH Consortium –
Is the Accredidation after European Approach possible?

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Partner Institution & Country	Accredidation after European Approach for Joint Programmes	Crossboarder Quality Assurance
UAS St. Pölten (USTP) / Austria	Austria is accepting EA for all Higher Education Institutions	UAS: yes, after having been re-accredited by AQ Austria
Jamk UAS / Finland	Finland is accepting EA for all HEI	Recognising EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national external QA requirements; Reviews treated in same was as done by FINEEC
Saxion UAS / Netherlands	The Netherlands are accepting EA for JP for all HEI.	Recognising foreign agencies based on their own framework/requirements; EQAR-agency must agree to terms of condition to NVAO and the penal secretary has to be trained by NVAO; NVAO takes final decision on accredidation (3 - 4 month)

Gaps and added value – our reflections so far (work in progress)

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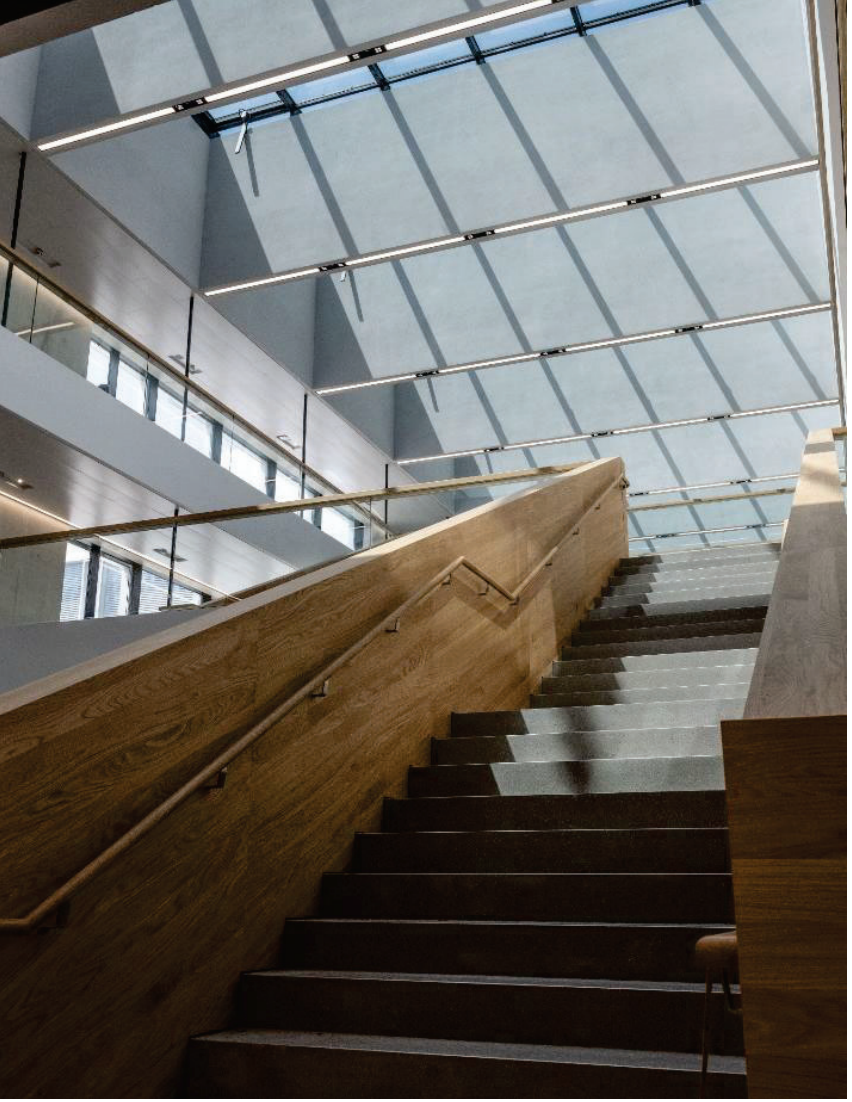
- Constraint to EU and EEA EFTA states fulfills the political intention – but questions arise for existing joint programmes with non-EU countries (attractivity for consortia and students?)
- Joint degree and joint diploma supplement → obstacle in some cases
- Only 5 out of 14 items in Part A are actually automatically fulfilled by the European Approach
- How to cope with criteria of the European Degree Label requiring a different approach in an accredited programme? (e.g. Physical Mobility Track vs. policy for students who can't travel)
- Part B: criteria about digitalisation, European values, environmental sustainability need to be specifically addressed for some programmes → need for an honest gap analysis
- Effort and time plan for SER and supporting documentation – even if the programme has been accredited after the European Approach
- How to communicate **the expected added value of the European Degree Label** (not there yet) **to partners and prospective students**?



Thanks!

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