


**Accreditation of joint programs according to the European
Approach by the Accreditation Council**

As of July 7, 2025

Summary

- The Accreditation Council may recognize evaluations of joint programs that have been conducted in accordance with the European Approach (EA) in a simplified procedure.
 - Legally, these decisions are equivalent to accreditations or constitute accreditations bearing the Accreditation Council's seal.
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Legal basis: Sections 10, 16, and 33 MRVO – I

- Sections 10, 16, and 33 of the MRVO transpose the EA into German law; the EA itself is mentioned only in the preamble to the MRVO for legal reasons.
- ❖ The formal and substantive criteria for joint programs under Section 10(2) and Section 16(1) MRVO correspond to the criteria of the European Approach.
- ❖ The procedural rules of the European Approach have been incorporated into Section 33(1), sentence 2, nos. 1 through 7 of the MRVO.

Legal basis: Sections 10, 16, and 33 of the MRVO – II

- According to § 10(1) MRVO, joint programs are degree programs that lead to joint degrees (joint degrees) or a double or multiple degree. In addition, they must possess the further characteristics specified in § 10(1) of the regulation:
 - ❖ Integrated curriculum,
 - ❖ a study component at one or more foreign universities of generally at least 25 percent,
 - ❖ contractually regulated cooperation,
 - ❖ coordinated admission and examination procedures, and
 - ❖ joint quality assurance.
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Legal basis: Sections 10, 16, and 33 of the MRVO – III

- A prerequisite for the application of the special rules under Sections 10, 16, and 33 of the MRVO is that the participating institutions are recognized as higher education institutions by the competent authorities of their respective states and that the relevant national legal frameworks permit participation in joint programs (see the explanatory memorandum to Section 10 MRVO).
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Procedure for recognition in program accreditation pursuant to Section 33 MRVO – I

- Section 33 MRVO describes the procedure.
 - It is a long section, but the procedure is generally straightforward.
 - The following steps must be taken prior to the agency's review:
 - ❖ Preliminary notification pursuant to § 33(1), sentence 2, no. 1 MRVO **via email to the registry**: This is an informal confirmation from the university that it has verified that the requirements of § 10(1) MRVO are met and that it is aware that the applicability of § 33 MRVO is subject to the expert opinion and the final decision of the Accreditation Council.
 - ❖ If necessary, contact the AR office by phone to discuss any open questions.
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Procedure for recognition in program accreditation pursuant to § 33 MRVO – II

- Following the evaluation by the Agency: **Submit an application in ELIAS** (application type “08. Recognition of Accreditation Decisions (European Approach)”) along with the following documents:
 - ❖ Report on the evaluation conducted in accordance with the EA
 - ❖ Self-Report
 - ❖ Accreditation decision by the agency (if available)
 - ❖ Proof of compliance with requirements, if applicable

 - If necessary, the Secretariat will request additional documents, e.g., regarding the procedural process, if such information is not included in the other documents.
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What does the Accreditation Council review?

- The Accreditation Council only reviews whether an evaluation in accordance with the EA has taken place, i.e., whether the program was evaluated according to the EA's criteria and procedural rules.
 - It does not conduct a second evaluation of the program!
 - For recognition, however, it requires an evaluation report that clearly indicates the application of the EA; if this is not the case, the application must be rejected or the evaluation report revised.
 - For this reason, it is very important for the university to clarify in advance with the agency whether an evaluation in accordance with the EA is possible!
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Which agencies are eligible?

- Any agency listed in the registry may conduct the procedure.
 - To date, the Accreditation Council has recognized evaluations by both foreign and German agencies.
 - When evaluating degree programs according to the European Approach, German agencies operate outside the scope of their accreditation by the Accreditation Council (see the rationale for § 33 MRVO).
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Fulfilment of Conditions

- Section 33(1), sentence 2, no. 6 of the MRVO stipulates that any conditions set by the evaluators or the agency must be met before the Accreditation Council can make a decision on recognition.

Executive Board Decision

- The Accreditation Council has delegated accreditation decisions to the Executive Board so that decisions can be made promptly and the university does not have to adhere to the Accreditation Council's meeting schedule.

Accreditation period

- According to Section 33(1), sentence 5, of the MRVO, the accreditation period is six years.

Are translations required?

- A translation into German of documents available in English (self-assessment report, annexes to the self-assessment report, expert opinions, and the Agency's decision) into German is not required.
 - If the evaluation process was conducted in a language other than English (i.e., in German or a third language),
 - ❖ a version of the expert opinion and the Agency's decision in the original language
 - ❖ , as well as a summary of the expert opinion in English and an English translation of the Agency's decision, including its rationale, must be submitted to the Accreditation Council.
 - The summary of the report and the Agency's decision must clearly indicate that the procedure was conducted in accordance with the European Approach, and the evaluation results for each individual criterion of the European Approach must be presented transparently.
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Application of the EA to system-accredited institutions

- The system-accredited institution may decide whether to ensure the quality of a joint program through its internal QM or through program accreditation.
 - ❖ If the institution opts for program accreditation, quality assurance for this degree program continues to be conducted externally and not through the internal QM mechanisms of the system-accredited institution.
 - ❖ Otherwise, the criteria of the European Approach can be applied solely through the mechanisms of the internal QM system. Compliance with the procedural rules of the European Approach (which are also mentioned in § 33 MRVO) and, in particular, recognition by the Accreditation Council is not required in this case.
 - ❖ The system-accredited university must consult with the partner universities involved in the program and work with them to determine which national requirements for external quality assurance apply.
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Is the use of the EA mandatory? (I)

- For joint programs involving only higher education institutions from the European Higher Education Area, the following applies:
 - ❖ The application of the *criteria* specified in § 10 and § 16 (which correspond to the criteria of the European Approach) is mandatory.
 - ❖ In this case, conducting a *procedure* in accordance with the European Approach and obtaining recognition from the AR is optional. This clarifies the rationale for § 33 MRVO. Accordingly, even for joint programs, universities have the option of conducting a “standard” review process instead of following the European Approach and subsequently submit a standard application for accreditation to the Accreditation Council. The difference from national accreditation procedures is then (only) that the set of criteria of the European Approach is applied.
 - ❖ "Standard" accreditation under Section 22 makes sense, for example, if the European Approach has not been implemented—or has not been fully implemented—in a partner country of the German higher education institution, and therefore a procedure based on the European Approach cannot be carried out (for example, a joint self-evaluation report by the institutions is not possible for this reason).
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Is the application of the EA mandatory? (II)

- For joint programs, including those involving institutions that do not belong to the European Higher Education Area, the following applies:
 - ❖ The European Approach applies only if the cooperation partners from outside the European Higher Education Area commit to accreditation using the criteria and procedural rules of the European Approach. This is to be assumed if a procedure in accordance with the European Approach has been or is being carried out.
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