


**Accreditation of joint programs in accordance with 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 implement 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 § 10(2) and § 16(1) MRVO correspond to the criteria of the European Approach.
 - ❖ The procedural rules of the European Approach have been incorporated into § 33(1), sentence 2, nos. 1 through 7 MRVO.
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Legal basis: Sections 10, 16, and 33 MRVO – II

- According to § 10(1) MRVO, joint programs are degree programs leading to joint degrees (joint degrees) or a double or multiple degree. In addition, they must exhibit 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 §§ 10, 16, and 33 MRVO is that the participating higher education institutions are recognized as such by the competent authorities of their respective countries and that the respective national legal frameworks permit participation in joint programs (see the explanatory memorandum to § 10 MRVO).
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Procedure for recognition in program accreditation pursuant to § 33 MRVO – I

- Section 33 MRVO describes the procedural flow.
 - It is a long section, but the procedure is generally straightforward.
 - The following must be done prior to the Agency's review:
 - ❖ Advance notification pursuant to Sections 33(1), sentence 2, no. 1 MRVO **via email to the Secretariat:** 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 panel's vote and the final decision of the Accreditation Council.
 - ❖ If necessary, a phone call with the AR office 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)”) and attach the following documents:
 - ❖ Report on the evaluation according to the EA
 - ❖ Self-report
 - ❖ Accreditation decision of the Agency (if available)
 - ❖ If applicable, proof of compliance with conditions

 - The Secretariat may request additional documents if necessary, 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!
 - However, for recognition, 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 register 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 authorization by the Accreditation Council (see the rationale for § 33 MRVO).
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Compliance with 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 recognition decisions to the Executive Board so that decisions can be made promptly and the universities do not have to wait for the Accreditation Council's meeting dates.

Accreditation period

- Pursuant 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 expert 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 by means of 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 application 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* mentioned in § 10 and § 16 (which correspond to the criteria of the European Approach) is mandatory.
 - ❖ Conducting a *procedure* in accordance with the European Approach and obtaining recognition by the AR is optional in this case. This is clarified in the rationale for § 33 MRVO. Accordingly, even for joint programs, universities have the option of conducting a “standard” evaluation procedure instead of following the European 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.
 - ❖ A “normal” accreditation under § 22 makes sense, for example, if the European Approach is not implemented or not fully implemented in a partner country of the German university and therefore a procedure in accordance with the European Approach cannot be carried out (for example, the joint self-evaluation report of the universities is therefore not possible).
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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 has been or is being conducted in accordance with the European Approach.